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ISSUE 184 SEPTEMBER 2007

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BRITAIN'S BEST PC GAMES MAG

PCZONE



COVER STORY

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SPACE SIEGE

Dungeon Siege takes to the stars in a sci-fi RPG epic from Gas Powered Games



NEVERQUEST 123

"I'm not on mushrooms - this is life in the Shire..."



STALKER: CLEAR SKY

WITNESS AI FACTION WARS ERUPTING THROUGHOUT THE EXCLUSION ZONE!

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WHAT'S ON THE COVER?



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46 EARTH NO MORE

Too busy? *PC ZONE* in 54 words...
If you draw a Venn diagram of the sets 'People Who Like Sci-Fi' and 'People Who Play PC Games', you'll end up with a shape a lot like two circles that are almost completely overlapping. With this in mind, we've done a massive sci-fi special. Hopefully you're in the right bit of the circle.



THE FUTURE

I'M WRITING THIS column dressed in a silver space-suit, floating around on the moon using the latest voice-input home entertainment robot. At least, I would be if the books and comics I'd read growing up hadn't lied to me so spectacularly. Bastards.

However, I can't blame science fiction for dashing my hopes of a gleaming techno-utopia, as the genre has endlessly inspired my imagination and healthily skewed my view of the world through magnificent TV such as *Dr Who*, movies like *Blade Runner* and of course, videogames. In this issue, we unashamedly celebrate the glorious geekdom that is sci-fi with over 32 pages of games that you'll be playing on a lowly 21st century PC very soon.

We've exclusives of the new *STALKER* prequel *Clear Sky*, 3D Realms' potentially groundbreaking co-op FPS *Earth No More* and our cover game *Space Siege*, created by Chris 'Supreme Commander' Taylor. Also, don't miss our catch-ups with *Fallout 3*, *Half-Life 2: Episode Two*, *Quake Wars* and *Tabula Rasa*. Yes, as the world slides into a catastrophic maelstrom of wars, environmental catastrophes, disease and Spice Girls reunions, you can be happy in the knowledge that the PC's future has never looked so good.

Jamie Sefton

Jamie Sefton, editor

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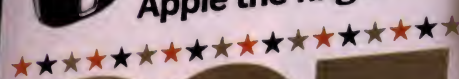
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Ubisoft's squad-based shooter explodes into action once again, but how does it measure up?

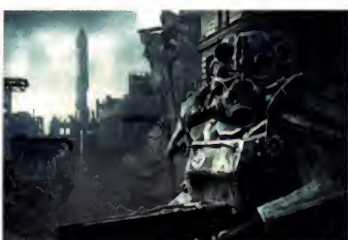
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HEAR US SPEAK! 118

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OUR PRESENCE ON THE
INTERNET IS PROOF
THAT WE DO NOT



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It's science fiction, ladies and gentlemen, so if you'd all like to stand back a bit, we're doing a special on it

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MEET THE TEAM

A long time ago, and in a darkened office quite far away...

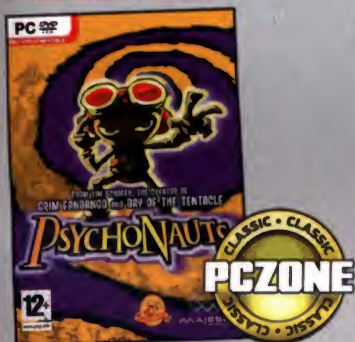
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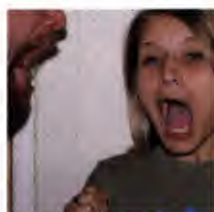
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SUZY WALLACE

Science Officer turned Badass
AGE: 28

LIKES: Jones The Cat

DISLIKES: Ian Holm and Aliens

FANCIES: Him out of Terminator

FAVE GAME: Final Fantasy VII

PLAYING NOW: Company Of Heroes

When not strapping herself into heavy-lifting exoskeletons and stomping around the offices of Future Publishing shouting, "Get the fark away from her you bitch!" at all those she meets, Suzy likes nothing more than taking humorous photos of the ship's cat or coming back to life as a human/alien hybrid. Originally recruited to look after the reviews and cover DVD of PC ZONE, the increasingly gruesome deaths of her work-mates means she now pretty much has to do everything on her own. Little does she know that we're all skiving, cocooned 10m above her head!



PAUL PRESLEY

CEO of cloud-mining corp

Visiting their old friend Prez for the first time in ages, the PCZ team were shocked to discover that he'd sold them out to an intergalactic dictatorship co-led by a fancy-dress magician. The swine.

WHAT ARE YOU PLAYING:

EVE Online



JON 'LOG' BLYTH

Blake out of Blake's 7

Largely appreciated by balding men in their late 30s, if you go round Log's house and shut the door then the whole house wobbles. He's also relentlessly pursued by ladies covered in Bacofail.

WHAT ARE YOU PLAYING:

Venice



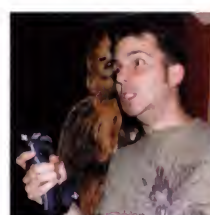
MARTIN KORDA

High Emperor of Korgonia

Korda has been attempting to destroy Earth this month, a feat made difficult by slave-girls refusing to marry him and Brian Blessed and his troupe of flying bears assaulting his finest war-rockets.

WHAT ARE YOU PLAYING:

GRAW 2



WILL PORTER

Rookie Hotshot

Having started out shooting womprats from the back of a Mazda van on his dad's farm, Will recently destroyed a gigantic laser-toting space-station. There was substantial loss of life, so well done him.

WHAT ARE YOU PLAYING:

Civ IV: Beyond The Sword



JAMIE SEFTON

Starfleet Admiral

Despite serving a utopian society where poverty has been abolished and money is of no issue, Sefton still manages to complain about the cost of replicated northern ales and bread and dripping.

WHAT ARE YOU PLAYING:

Rise Of The Triad



STEVE HOGARTY

Jabba's little monkey mate

Hogarty can often be found looking on in horror as he watches ladies in bikinis with chains attempting to kill giant muscle-slug creatures. Some blame the internet, we just blame society.

WHAT ARE YOU PLAYING:

Quake Wars Beta

STUFF THAT'S HELPED US THIS MONTH... Vault Boy figurines, miniature bottles of wine and an amusing story of a hospital poo gone wrong
STUFF THAT HASN'T HELPED US THIS MONTH... Games publishers who never, ever answer their phone so we can have a shout at them

STUFF WE'VE BEEN TALKING ABOUT...

GLASTONBURY	87 Mins	Never did we think that there could be so many stories about mud
TOWELS	25 Mins	Left in the tumble-dryer they're fluffy, left on a radiator they're crispy. Science!
TESCO'S FINEST 'JAZZ' APPLES	8 Mins	Taste a little like pear, but sound a little like someone was taking the piss
THE CAT PROTECTION LEAGUE	16 Mins	A lovely lady answers the phone. But she doesn't half go on about feral cats
UNEXPECTED INVOLVEMENT IN GAME NAMING	83 Mins	The judgement of Porter changing gaming as we know it
FAKE FACEBOOK FRIENDS	34 Mins	I don't know you. I don't like you. Stop with the poking
THE QUAKE WARS BETA	52 Mins	Some unexpected controversy, but Hogarty is still addicted
LOG'S EX-GIRLFRIEND JENNIFER TOLSTOY	43 Mins	And her exciting updates on Log's blog at www.disappointment.com
MEETING FORUM PEOPLE IN THE PUB	12 Mins	Involves a lot of poking apparently. But a genuinely nice bunch
LOG'S NAUGHTY PHONETIC ALPHABET	40 Mins	'A for apple. V for... Vivacious. P for, erm... Penis?'

WIN!

Tiny Compo likes nothing more than tumbling out of a hired limo in the Bigg Market area of Newcastle and drinking copious amounts of WKD. After emerging at 2am in the morning and shouting at strangers, she finds a suitable piece of pavement before beginning to regurgitate competition entries. The one fished out this month was that of Jo Orr from Surrey, who wins *IL-2 Sturmovik: 1946*. Send this month's entries to Nee Nor Nee Nor 184, PC ZONE, Future Publishing, 2 Balcombe Street, London NW1 6NW.

GENERAL COMPETITION TERMS & CONDITIONS: 1. Only completed entries received before the closing date will be entered. 2. Winners will be notified by pm. 3. No cash alternative. 4. Prizes not necessarily as shown. 5. No correspondence will be entered into. 6. The editor's decision is final. 7. Responsibility cannot be accepted for lost or undelivered entries. 8. Competitions are not open to readers outside the UK or employees of Future or its affiliated companies, their families, agents or anyone professionally connected with the competition. Pimp Pimp!

LETTERS



He's all smiles now, but *Jon 'Log' Blyth* can't see that menacing-looking bin creeping up on him...



KING OF LETTERS

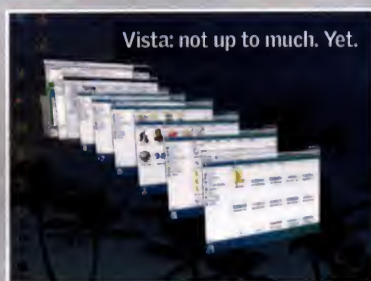
STOP BULLYING MICROSOFT

In the modern world of the PC that we all know and love, I find your magazine a breath of fresh air. You speak your mind, something very few people seem to do these days. However, your about-turn on Vista is becoming annoying to say the least...

I've been an IT technician for the past 15 years. I've just installed Vista on my home PC (e6300 dual-core, 8600GTS, 2GB RAM), and it's a dream to use! The crashes that hung XP no longer appear. Plus, if a program hangs, I've never been forced to reboot. In addition, the installation barely took 35 minutes.

[Edit: the missing paragraphs discuss the compatibility of most applications, OpenGL, NVIDIA's drivers being shoddy, all new OSs having teething issues, and how only six months ago we were singing the praises of Vista, so what's changed all of a sudden?]

It's about time you stopped riding



Vista: not up to much. Yet.

the bandwagon of OS abuse! Stand on your own feet and actually show the public that Vista is stable, quick, functional and user-friendly. Go on - restore my faith in you.

Neil Jary

Glad you're enjoying Vista. We remain hopeful for Vista's future; we love a bit of pretty, and we're easily mesmerised by semi-opaque panels gliding around. But we're a games magazine, and what benefits has Vista brought the gamer? A short-lived *Geometry Wars* exclusive? Extra snow on *Lost Planet*? *Halo 2*, *Shadowrun*? From a gaming angle, it's a shockingly shoddy launch.

WIN!



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We're in a no-win situation; if we were pro-Vista, we'd be accused of towing the corporate line. We're honest - we don't feign enthusiasm, and we'd never fake a sneer. When Vista actually becomes worth the jump to gamers - and it will - we'll be the first to say so.



Rob Woods' PC ZONE collection, with added cat sick. Nice.

LORD OF THE RINGS

Received your most recent issue and was pleased to see the in-game *Lord Of The Rings Online* offer code which was supposed to be printed on the back of the DVD. Alas, no code! My little dwarf champion will starve. Would it be possible to receive a code please?

Emmet Cleere

Ah, you see it was written in magical elvish writing that only reveals itself when you scatter runes onto a tin tray under a blood solstice. Either that or some idiots forgot to print the damn things. A million

apologies, and your replacement bread is on the way.

PUT THE REBOOT IN

I've been running my PC for quite some time now on the current Microsoft OS, but have never really had much joy with it. The drivers never worked, especially NVIDIA drivers. There were soundcard problems, high memory utilisation, poor performance and games simply refused to work or crashed within seconds of loading.

Then I found a new operating system. It installed easily, and apart from quite a few updates to fully secure my PC, it's

"My girl calls me a hoarder, and the four-year-old cat sick under the bed probably proves her correct"

Rob Woods is a devoted ZONER

See the robot wearing a sombrero? No, neither do we.

been a joy to use. It's fast, slick and I never have any trouble getting games or software to run. In short, it works!

The name of this OS? I 'upgraded' to Windows XP. Congratulations are due to Microsoft on improving massively their old Vista platform. This new XP really does knock the old OS for six on just about every front.

Phil Yockney

Stop it, Phil, you'll make it look like we put your letter in just to annoy the King Of Letters. Well, that's our commitment to journalistic balance sorted out. Now, let's change the subject and talk about hobbits.

LORD OF THE BRIMS

In issue 183, just under the writing on page 15, does anyone else see a robot wearing a sombrero in *World In Conflict*, or is it just me?

Richard Eastwood

It does look a bit like that, now you mention it. This month, we've hidden a goose in a poncho somewhere in the magazine. Can you find it?

HOARD OF THE RING-BINDERS

My girlfriend has finally convinced me to redecorate my bedroom from the previous owner's ladylike pink, to something more manly. After stripping the room down (see photo, opposite), lo! My PC ZONE collection, all laid before me! And this is only the last five or six years' worth: I've got all the others in my

loft, along with loads of *Amiga Powers*, Sega and Nintendo mags from the '90s.

My girl calls me a hoarder, and the four-year-old cat sick under the bed probably proves her correct. Anyway, from a long-term subscriber, thanks for all the years of good work!

Rob Woods

Blimey. You don't have a copy of issue three, do you? We're missing that one ourselves.

THE BIG BAD MAN

In the days of *Doom*, it took only a few dedicated people to make a kick-ass

game. Now, games are huge. Not that I'm complaining – *Oblivion* is one of the best games ever.

But are games going to start becoming too impersonal? Will it start to be about the money and not the game? (This is not referring to the companies who've already crossed that line.) Maybe it's time to draw the line before we get too big for ourselves.

James Iams

As much as I hate to argue on behalf of those brainless, mechanical corporations, you wouldn't get a game like *Oblivion* without someone paying the hundreds of developers while they worked. And with the success of

Does *diablo2* have any single-player cheats?
Dan gee.

Not many. You can alter the monster difficulty – and therefore the item drop quality – by telling the PC you've got more members than you really have. Just type /players 8 in chat.

Plz can u tell me when *Crysis* is out and what graphics card/s to buy (loaded option).
J Sparks

Crytek are only saying it'll need an 8800 GTS to run on ultra-high settings. We're holding out for DX10 mind. Current release is autumn.

A new deus ex?? Unnnghh – Splat! I think i just came!

Scarypharaoh

We know. We heard the splat sound.



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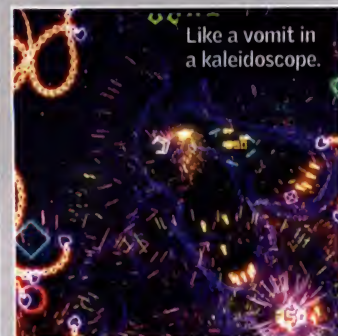
GEOMETRY WARS: RETRO EVOLVED

Send in by J-P Taylor

PC ZONE score: 80%

When *Geometry Wars* came out on Xbox LIVE Arcade, I actually managed to smash a wireless controller against the wall. People might have poked their eyes out with a Wii controller, but if anyone was standing between me and the wall when I threw that controller, they'd have had their face whipped off. And now I've got it on my PC, on a wired 360 controller. If I end up strangling myself or a loved one with this cord, as another tiny stupid pink square I didn't see destroys my ship and resets my 5x multiplier, then Bizarre Creations are to blame, and I want my corpse posting to their head offices.

Your shout: 75%



Like a vomit in a kaleidoscope.

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ASK THE TXTPERTS

Want to know a PC game release date? Need advice on what graphics card to buy? Just want somewhere to rant incoherently in 'youth speak'? Simply text the PC ZONE 'Txtperts' (see what we did there?) and we'll answer you right here...



Come on *Crysis*. Hurry up!

Text your PC game-related nonsense to 87103, putting PCZTXT at the beginning of the message, then leave a space, and continue with your text – and don't forget your name. Texts should be no more than 160 characters long.

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Geometry Wars (developed mainly by one guy), the future doesn't seem as bleak as the tedious doomsayers would have it. There's plenty of fun indie stuff out there, and with **Best Of The Underground** recently released on Steam, maybe we can look forward to more solid, inexpensive, passionately developed and available fun.

W.H.A.T.E.V.E.R.

Either I'm getting old, or I've watched too many horror movies. The recent games I've played just don't scare me anymore. I recently finished *Quake 4* and installed *F.E.A.R.*. Then I watched some evil-looking man greedily eating some dead guy, and thought, 'finally, a game that'll force me to buy Pampers'. In *Quake*, the Strogg looked like Care Bears. Thirty minutes in though, and nothing. Just soldiers with guns and a little girl who keeps appearing in odd places.

What's happening? Turn off the lighting, play some scary music, have some monster growl and expect the gamer to scream like a girl? Pfffft!!! I remember playing *Baldur's Gate II: Shadows Of Amn*: when I saw my first dragon, Jesus, I didn't know what to do. I forgot all the shortcuts to my spells, weapons and had no strategy at all. That's proper fear: when the game makes you feel like it's the one in control, not you.

John K Nairobi

I know what you mean. The last time I felt scared playing a game was when a power-cut made me worry about not saving my game. May I suggest that the world of gaming is an inherently safe one, and that you should perhaps embark of a life of international jewel theft? There's nothing quite like getting chased around a museum by three

Actual photo of Alanis Morissette, aged six.



"Real fear is when the game makes you feel like it's in control, not you"

John K Nairobi bemoans modern games

Doberman Pinschers to blow the cobwebs off.

PITCHES, LEAVE

While playing a particularly tricky level of an old game, I suddenly had the brightest flash of inspiration for a new game. My idea is a big twist on an old theme, and would make an entirely different genre.

Of course, my idea bloomed into nothingness since I don't know the first thing about writing games, and I have no idea where to take this conceptual idea. If you guys know anything about this sort of thing I'd love to hear it, because I'd love to see my idea come to fruition. How about holding a competition for gaming ideas and the best one gets a game made out of it?

Jon Gilbey

You've invented a genre? Quick, tell us. We're honest as the day is long – which is pretty long at this time of year – and we promise not to call it 'OUR GROUND-BREAKING RAYMAN IDEA' and pitch it to Ubisoft.

Of course, we ran a similar competition back in 2004 with our 'Search For A Game', where Porter dressed up as a woman (any excuse) and Sefton played the Simon Cowell role with high-waisted aplomb. Should it return? Write in and let us know what you think. If demand is high, bagsie I be Dannii Minogue and Porter can reprise his female role, this time round as Sharon Osbourne. It's a winner!

SAM HAS A THEORY

I have a theory. A theory so fantastically brilliant I felt I should tell someone before my brain implodes under its own amazingness. At the end of *Half-Life: Opposing Force*, Corporal Shepherd is trapped by the G-Man, the same as Freeman. So now the G-Man is having some trouble controlling the intrepid ginger scientist, who do you think he'll recruit to solve the situation? I can't believe mystic Wilma didn't get it sooner.

Sam Cheney

I just read this out to Mystic Wilma, and these are the actual words s/he managed to snarl at me. "Try to take the bread out of my mouth with your hokey gaming soothsaying, will you?" Time for a psychic showdown... **PCZ**

WHAT'S ON THE PCZ HARD DRIVE?

SPACEMONGER

www.sixty-five.cc/sm/

A useful program that lets you look at what's on your hard drive, and how much space it's taking up.

X3 SAVE FILES

<http://tinyurl.com/d9ze7>

We may have had to uninstall the game to make room, but there's no way we're giving up those precious hours of empire-building nonsense just to play another demo where a frog jumps into a hat.

VENICE (DELUXE)

www.popcap.com

Is the latest PopCap able to follow the compulsive *Peggle*? Well, it's got that PopCap polish, but it ain't no *Peggle*...

WHAT'S ON YOUR HARD DRIVE?

THIS MONTH: CHIPMUNKCHEEKS (AKA CHARLIE LATTIMER)

WORLD OF WARCRAFT

Chipmunkcheeks is having a difficult time making an emphatic decision on this one: "I'm going cold turkey, but I just can't bring myself to delete it." Imagine the patches, 'Cheeks, imagine the patches.

TRACKMANIA

It's good to know that giving up *WOW* isn't part of a more insidious regime to give up gaming altogether. "I'm trying to substitute *WOW* with *TrackMania*." There's methadone in his madness.

MR ROBOT DEMO

"I can't be bothered to delete it." Congratulations, Chipmunkcheeks – that's exactly the kind of apathetic clutter that we endorse here at ZONE.

Want to tell us what's on your hard drive? Visit our forums at www.pczone.co.uk and let rip.

PCZONE AROUND THE WORLD



We want photos of you with **PC ZONE** in the most exotic or inappropriate locations. Candid celeb shots count double. Every one printed wins a prize!

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ON DIRT IS A CRIME
AGAINST GAMES”

Xbox 360: The Official Xbox Magazine



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Extreme



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being the fastest and staying in control.
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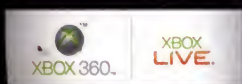
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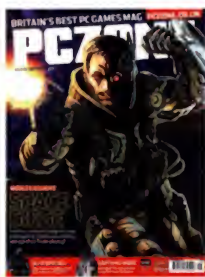
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COVER STORY

SPACE SIEGE

One small step for a space hero with a cybernetic arm, and a giant leap for the RPG?



FIRST THERE WAS *Dungeon Siege*, and it was in a dungeon. Now there comes *Space Siege*, and it's in space. A game so new, so fresh and so intriguing we were simply itching to lovingly drip it onto our cover. It's the latest barnstormer to be extracted from the mind of insane games genius Chris Taylor. Formerly responsible for *Total Annihilation*, *Supreme Commander* and (surprise) *Dungeon Siege*, he's undoubtedly the backbone of pure PC gaming. This new tale of cybernetic upgrades, a growing loss of humanity and intense bug-blasting is a sci-fi hit in the making. Over to you, Mr Taylor...

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PCZONE

UPFRONT

Everything that matters in the world of PC gaming

Banhunt

I'M ONE OF the few people who actually thought that *Manhunt* was any good. Now, I'm certainly not suggesting it was great – the fifth time you stick a shard of glass into a guy's eye socket is where it starts getting slightly tedious – but it wasn't as awful as everybody claims it was. You could say it was a parody of the glorification of violence in the media itself, with you being manipulated by a snuff movie director who's kidnapped your family in the name of reality TV. But you could also say Rockstar were merely experimenting with their 'controversy = profit' theory.

So now the BBFC have banned *Manhunt 2*, a game that would have undoubtedly arrived on our desktops had it been allowed to run its tabloid-baiting course. It was heading for the Wii first, though, notoriously, where it'd let you literally strangle the elderly, or beat them with dildos using your Wiimote – no doubt so you could practise for the real thing. It's equalled in its sadism by *Saw* and *Hostel* too, movies whose trailers are shown on television after 9pm when children cease to exist – but despite this, it's been shot down. And probably with good reason. The games industry is far too flimsily regulated to safely host something as brutal as kicking a cowering foetal-positioned mental patient in the face until dead. Start slapping retailers with crippling fines for selling to underage kids, and maybe we can start to allow such 'mature' titles to be sold.

Steve Hogarty

Steve Hogarty, section editor

CONGESTION CHARGE

Hellgate: London reveals the devil's in the subscription details

www.hellgatelondon.com | ETA: Q4

WANT TO AVOID being a second-rate citizen in the online portion of Flagship's post-apocalyptic RPG *Hellgate: London*? Well, then you'd better pay up. That's more or less the impression people get when faced with any tiered subscription service. We decided to speak to Bill Roper, CEO of Flagship, and tell him of our concerns.

"I think there are always people who'll try to look for the negative," ponders Roper. "They think you must be ripping them off somehow, but no, really, we're not. We're all gamers, and we're always thinking of what's best for the game and best for other gamers. What would I want? I know I'd want a game where I can buy it, play as much as I want offline and then have the same experience online with my friends. Then when I want more, I can get that too."

So what exactly will your \$9.99 a month get you in a ruined future London? "Well,"

says Roper, "we wanted to have the best of both worlds: to give people the free experience they're expecting, because this is from the *Diablo* team, but at the same time to provide continuing content. We want to be able to stream things into the game continuously – additional gameplay modes, mods, quests, monsters and environments, special events for special days, weekly events, things that are ongoing and that go above and beyond balance-fixes and bugs – even up to and including new factions and character classes.

"The idea is that we're streaming these things to people on no set schedule," he continues, "but then at the end of every quarter or something, we do a big thing such as adding a new character class or some story. The subscription is a way for us to be able to maintain that live team – not only by building what we think the game needs, but by interacting with the community a

lot. Do they want more of this? More of that? Do they want to expand PvP, and how do they want to do that? I think as we go through the game our fanbase will be able to interact in this way, and almost shape the game themselves."

Sounds good to us, and refutes any knee-jerk reactions we might have had. We also ask how Roper thinks the fun-hating Church of England might react to St Paul's Cathedral being used in *Hellgate: London*. "Ha ha," laughs Roper. "I'd imagine that if there were demons in real life, the Church of England would be pro-getting-rid-of-demons. Hopefully they see that it's not meant in any way to be disrespecting any religion or society; it's just a fantasy game, and London is an incredibly compelling city to set things in. And we, for the most part, tend to stay out of churches, even if it's part of the background story."

It'll still be cheaper than real London.



"Stop all the fighting!"



Eat flame, chuggers!



STOP PRESS!

MONKEY BUSINESS

Is there a fifth *Monkey Island* game in the pipeline? Leaked concept art suggests so, with a LeChuck whose beard is less flammy than we're used to...

FORGED ALLIANCE

The *Supreme Commander* expansion will feature 100 new units and orbital installations. And a new faction too, who will no doubt own a big robot.

LEGO MMO

The LEGO gaming assault continues, with talk of a LEGO MMO. Will it be a *Garry's Mod* sandbox? *Second Life*, with removable heads? Or *WOW*-like missions?

36

Space Siege

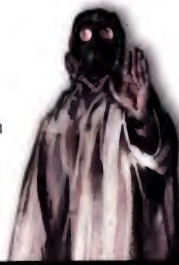
In space, nobody can hear you level up, except Chris Taylor, who can hear everything.



46

Earth No More

Oh, come on, leave Earth alone. Earth is lovely. Stop teasing poor Earth with your first-person adventure-game names.



58

STALKER: Clear Sky - Prologue

First look at the prequel that's bringing war to the forbidden zone



You can probably fly this.



You can probably drive this.



And you can probably make this guy flip over.

GT YAY, MORE LIKE

GTA IV hangs off helicopters and generally causes explosions...

www.rockstargames.com | ETA: TBA

ROCKSTAR ALMOST UPROOTED the internet from its data-packet struts by posting their last *GTA IV* trailer and mesmerising millions of fans. Their second trailer did much the same thing, all the while revealing more details about the sequel. We've no confirmation that it'll be coming to PC, but we will laugh and

mock anybody who claims that it won't.

Things to look out for include jumping out of a car and having it roll into a petrol pump and explode, bullets hitting the side of a car all realistic like and hanging off vans and helicopters. It's all in-game, but if you can do just half of it outside cut-scenes, we'll be more than excited.

Guild trip

Guild Wars: Eye Of The North set for August release

www.guildwars.com | ETA: August 31

NCSOFT HAVE STARTED revving the engines of the first proper expansion to *Guild Wars*, their seminally popular subscription-free online RPG. Where *Factions* and *Nightfall* added self-contained campaigns to the game, *Eye Of The North*, for £24.99, will unlock vast swathes of the fantasy continent. Here's what'll be spread across that wonderful new place: 18 big dungeons, 150 new skills, 10 new heroes and 40 new armour sets – along with the expected infusion of crateloads of new items and weapons, plus shiny magic things to wear on your face.

Eye Of The North will also contain a Hall of Monuments, which is some sort

of method of transferring accomplishments and titles from old *Guild Wars* to the upcoming *Guild Wars 2*. It's aimed squarely at the hearts and minds of current *Guild Wars* players, and if everybody's not really pleased with what developers ArenaNet are doing, co-founder Jeff Strain will gasp and fall off his seat backwards, and then post it on YouTube. We're fairly sure that won't happen, as it's looking rather good.

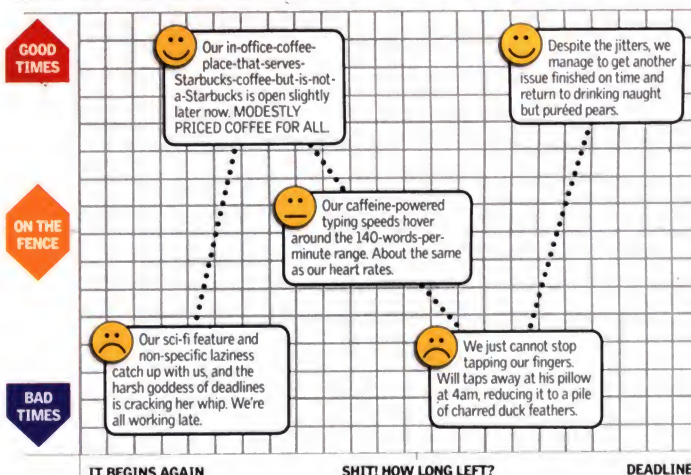
Eye Of The North will be ready to rumble on August 31, and will carry on *Guild Wars*' excellent tradition of subscription-free MMORPG gaming. Bless their generous socks.



STUFF

Every new developer these days claims to be made up of LucasArts alums... No sooner do we report that Bill Tiller's working on Gothic point-and-click adventure *A Vampyre Story* than amusingly named publishers Gamecock lift the lid on action-adventure title *Insecticide*. It's being developed by Crackpot, who are staffed by folks behind *Grim Fandango*, *Day Of The Tentacle*, *Sam & Max* and *Monkey Island* – and, ye gods, it looks every bit like *Psychonauts*.

LIFE IS A ROLLERCOASTER



COMIC TIMING

Pavel Barter shoots the breeze with videogame satirists and webcomic peddlers, Penny Arcade...



Reporter
Pavel Barter

THIS IS LIKE talking to a couple of cartoon characters. Jerry Holkins and Mike Krahulik are waxing about *Second Life* and they're bouncing off each other.

Krahulik: "I tried it for an hour but couldn't understand the attraction."

Holkins: "I understand you can have a penis attachment. Is that true?"

Krahulik: "Yes, you can buy them."

Holkins: "That's pretty unique."

Krahulik: "To be honest, the penises don't look realistic. They look like crap."

Welcome to the world of Penny Arcade, a website – nay, an empire – that's not afraid to smartly slag off developers, publishers, even gamers. Penny Arcade have a knack of cutting to the core of the issue, be it over-hyped games, delayed

releases or the sheer adrenalin-fuelled joy of being a gamer. Well, all that, and they throw in top-shelf talk about penises for good measure.

IN FOR A PENNY...

Holkins and Krahulik have fingers, toes, and possibly winks, in every pie imaginable. These talented demigods of geekdom run an annual three-day expo, lecture at colleges, create comic-strip compilations and collectable card games, run a charity for needy nippers, and now are set to release an episodic PC game, *Penny Arcade Adventures: On the Rain-Slick Precipice of Darkness*. "In the near future, we're planning on launching a scent," deadpans Holkins.

Like all great love affairs – even though the pair are married to ladies – it began at High School. Holkins and Krahulik met in journalism class and worked their way through a procession of rubbish jobs before becoming a web phenomenon.

So how did Penny Arcade start? Holkins says: "A million years ago, when the world had just coalesced, we entered an online comic contest. We sent a number of submissions that the site did not like, possibly because they were extremely profane. Having our efforts

rebuked there, we started running the comics on our own website (www.penny-arcade.com) in late 1999."

Joining the pantheon of great cartoon pairings – Wallace and Gromit, Calvin and Hobbes, Blair and Bush – they created alter egos: Krahulik (the artist) is Gabe; Holkins (the writer) is Tycho. "Gabe is whimsical," reckons Krahulik. "I don't think he's dumb, but he's lazy and he's prone to violent outbursts. They're us, but they're exaggerations about the worst things in each of us."

Gabe is fascinated with unicorns, he line-dances with the Kansas City Hotsteppers and harbours homoerotic fantasies about Patrick Swayze. "I identify so strongly with him but he represents all of my worst qualities," says Holkins of Tycho, a Dungeons & Dragons-obsessive with a drink problem and a collection of giraffe pornography.

Throughout Penny Arcade's history, the pair have ripped on everything from Ion Storm's *Daikatana* palaver to the alleged spyware in *Battlefield 2142* and have been served enough cease-and-desist letters to supply the entire toilet paper industry on America's western seaboard. Unsurprisingly, they have an opinion about everything games-related.



Penny Arcade produce three comics a week...



Mike Krahulik (left) and Jerry Holkins, enjoying a spot of gaming.

"We detested movie tie-ins altogether until the likes of *Spider-Man 2* and *Riddick*," rants Holkins. Krahulik agrees: "If it's a big movie, publishers are going to sell the game regardless of how good it is. Why waste the time and money making it good? As for *Spider-Man 3*..."

EYE OF THE TIGER

Holkins moves on to the subject of videogame-based movie director Uwe Boll. "The boxing stuff was pretty fun (last year, Boll challenged his critics to a fight). You have to be pretty stupid to get into the ring with that guy. He was actually known as the Tiger – he used to be an amateur boxer. People believed him when he said that it was just for fun, just a bit of harmless PR. You're a fucking idiot if you get into a ring with a guy named the Tiger, then bitch about him beating you up."

Aside from their comic strip, which routinely features characters like Fruit Fucker and Jesus Christ, Holkins and

Krahulik have worked with a few selective publishers, crafting strips for *Painkiller* and *Prince Of Persia*, making a comedic user manual for *Splinter Cell: Chaos Theory*, and providing illustrations for the *World Of Warcraft* user guide. In 2004, the first Penny Arcade Expo (PAX) was launched and has now become an annual event that attracts gamers in their thousands.

COME TOGETHER

"Some people consider PAX a replacement for E3," remarks Holkins. "We think it's more about games and gaming culture than it is about a place for vendors to show off their products. We have an exhibition room – we're all gamers and want to see all the latest stuff – but the social stuff is more the focus. Two of the nights consist of full concert line-ups. There are movies, industry panels and plenty of tournaments."

You see, Penny Arcade isn't all about satirical smut; it even has heart. In 2003,

"He represents all my worst qualities," says Holkins of Tycho, who has a drink problem and a collection of giraffe porn

Funny business

Working 9 to 5, what a way to make a living...

What hour do you crawl into work?

Krahulik: "We show up in the office at around 9am. If it's a comic day we spend the morning surfing for game news and then around 10:30am we get together to talk about what we saw and to see if there's a comic in it. The comics all spring out of our conversations. We'll just be talking about a bit of news and one of us will laugh and then we say 'Hey, that might be a strip!'"

Is your work environment a living hell?

Krahulik: "I'd called it relaxed. Eight people work here in the PA office. We try to eat lunch together when we can and we play a lot of games together. We also take Ping Pong pretty seriously, so our table gets a lot of use. It's hard for me to imagine a better place to work, honestly."

What happens after you get a strip idea?

Krahulik: "Once we get a script written I spend the rest of the afternoon drawing it. I firstly draw each strip in pencil and then scan that in. Once it's in Photoshop, I use a Wacom tablet to digitally ink and colour the strip. I add in the text and then send it over to Tycho to post."

When do you call it a day?

Krahulik: "We try to get out of the office by 5pm. We've both got kids now so it's important for us to work a standard 9-to-5 day when possible. If it's not a comic day, we're working on our game. That project has really sort of filled up all the cracks in our work schedule."

the pair founded Child's Play (www.childsplaycharity.org), a charitable organisation that delivers gaming swag to children's hospitals across the globe.

Holkins explains: "Dorks end up with a lot of spare equipment. When you get a new machine, that old machine doesn't disintegrate. It's still useful equipment and can be put to a better purpose than propping open a door."

Despite their generous spirit, Penny Arcade are never far from trouble.

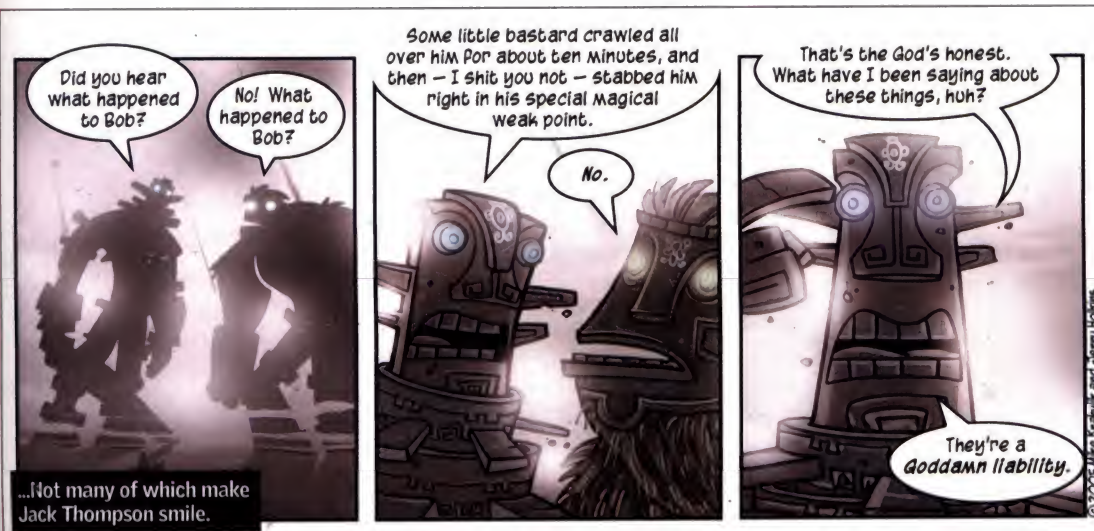
America's anti-videogame crusader Jack Thompson reported them to the FBI and called them 'terrorists' when they donated £10,000 to charity in his name after he allegedly reneged on a promise. Still, it gave them more material for their store of Penny Arcade merchandise: namely a 'I Hate Jack Thompson' T-shirt, which looks quite fetching next to the one that reads, 'Jesus Says: Don't be a dick'.

Boasting 53 million page views a month, Penny Arcade is likely to continue peddling its wares for many moons to come, although Krahulik is baffled as to the secret behind their success.

"If you figure it out let us know. We focus on making three funny comics a week and we don't worry about why it's popular or what we should do to maintain that. That would drive us insane." A bit like attachable penises in *Second Life*, then. **PCZ**

Is there anything you want Pavel Barter to investigate? (Warning: some jobs might be considered too big or too small...)

@ letters@pczone.co.uk
pavel barter, pc zone,
2 balcombe st, london, nw1 6nw



...Not many of which make Jack Thompson smile.

PORTER'S ORIGINAL GAMING MISCELLANY

A COMPENDIUM OF MEANINGLESS FACTS BASED AROUND
OUR CHOSEN HOBBY, PRESENTED IN A KOOKY AND OLD-
FASHIONED STYLE TO ENCOURAGE YOU TO PURCHASE IT
FOR AN ELDERLY RELATIVE COME YULETIDE...

THE ORIGIN OF RAPTURE

Rapture, the underwater city in forthcoming submarinal blockbuster *BioShock*, is so-called after a phenomenon experienced by scuba-divers called 'nitrogen narcosis' – famously described by Jacques Cousteau as 'the rapture of the deep'. Its trigger is a high nitrogen pressure within the body that in turn has an effect on nerve transmission – leaving a sufferer in a state akin to that of drunkenness or temporary mental imbalance. Divers suffering from this rapture have been known to feel extreme over-confidence, offering their oxygen supplies to nearby fish and stopping for cigarette breaks during their descent. Less extreme cases, meanwhile, have prompted feelings of exhaustion, paranoia and extreme anxiety. The city of Rapture then, a deep-sea seat of madness, scientific over-confidence and delusion, is entirely aptly named. It is also perhaps a reference to the rapture discussed in several branches of Christian belief in which at a specific point, the worthy ascend to a utopian heaven to join with Christ – although in this case, the utopia the worthy have been selected for is down below rather than up above.

THE MANY CELEBRITY NPC CAMEOS OF WORLD OF WARCRAFT

WHO?	WHAT?	WHERE?
Quartermaster Hicks and Quartermaster Hudson	Aliens	Goldshire
Colonel Kurzen	Apocalypse Now	Stranglethorn Vale
Captain Vimes	Discworld	Dustmallow Marsh
Tyler, Edward, Marla and Chloe	Fight Club	The Undercity
Spraggle Frock	Fraggle Rock	Un'goro Crater
Olivia, Newton and John	Grease	Stormwind
Klannoc Macleod	Highlander	Ratchet
Terry Palin	Monty Python	Elwynn Forest
Innkeeper Norman and Innkeeper Bates	Psycho	The Undercity
Winston Wolfe	Pulp Fiction	Ravenholdt
Clarice Foster	The Silence Of The Lambs	Thunder Bluff
Jhordie Lapforge	Star Trek: TNG	Gadgetzan
Farmer Kent	Superman	Southshore
Ichman, Slidore, Vipore, Guse, Jester and Maverick	Top Gun	Alterac Valley
Grimlok	Transformers	Uldaman



THE BOOKISH NATURE OF PC GAMING

Many developers cite books as direct influences to their work. *STALKER: Shadow Of Chernobyl*, for example, draws heavily from *Roadside Picnic* (1972) by Arkady and Boris Strugatsky. It deals with aliens leaving behind technologically astounding artefacts in different 'zones' on the planet, in which 'stalkers' risk their lives to hunt and trade. The most sought-after artefact in the novel also appears in the game's finale, a golden sphere apparently able to grant the wishes of those who discover it. Other games that draw themes from written fiction include *Halo* (*Ringworld* by Larry Niven), *BioShock* (*Atlas Shrugged* by Ayn Rand) and *Deus Ex* (*The Man Who Was Thursday* by GK Chesterton).

THE RELATIONSHIP OF DEUS EX TO THE LATE, GREAT BILL HICKS

Infamous and revolutionary comedian Bill Hicks recorded a studio album of his material called *Arizona Bay* that was released in 1997, three years after his death. In it, he expressed his dearest wish that Los Angeles would suffer an almighty earthquake and get devoured by the ocean: "All the shitty shows are gone, all the idiots screaming in the fucking wind are dead. I love it... Leaving nothing but a cool, beautiful serenity called Arizona Bay." In a direct nod to this, in the world of Warren Spector's opus *Deus Ex*, the earthquake has indeed struck in the year 2030, and Arizona Bay is what has been left behind.

THE DERIVATION OF LAMARR THE HEADCRAB

Half-Life 2's Dr Kleiner owns a debeaked headcrab known as Lamarr, and when she's in the process of escaping, he can be heard to mention: "There's only one Hedy." Hedy Lamarr was a highly successful Hollywood film actress, originally hailing from Austria. As well as playing seductive and passionate cinematic lead roles in the 1930s and '40s, however, she was a technological genius to boot. Specialising in communications, she came up with the concept of 'frequency-hopping' in 1942, originally intended to make radio-guided torpedoes harder to detect. Sadly, this technology was too advanced for the times, and wasn't integrated into US defence systems until 1962. Lamarr's concept, however, provided the basis for today's spread-spectrum communication – and is the foundation for mobile phone and wi-fi technology. No wonder a communications and teleportation expert like Kleiner holds her in such high regard.

THE SUPPLIER OF RAZPUTIN'S VOCALS

Psychonauts' lead voice talent is none other than Richard Steven Horvitz, the voice of television's inimitable Invader Zim. Also worthy of note is that man behind *Gears Of War*'s Marcus Fenix, none other than John DiMaggio, otherwise known as Bender in *Futurama*.

THE APPEARANCE OF MAX PAYNE IN PREY

As games produced by 3D Realms, the music you hear in *Prey* when the abducted children become possessed is the same as that heard in the original *Max Payne* when Payne's wife and baby are murdered. 3D Realms main men George Broussard and Scott Miller also appear in digital form as police officers in the NYPD HQ's basement in *Max Payne 2*.

THE REFERENCING OF SWAT 4 TO ITS PREDECESSORS

The man briefing you before your forays into chasing criminals is none other than one Sonny Bonds, the main character in the aged *Sierra Police Quest* adventures that the *SWAT* series emerged from.

THE CONSTIPATED GRIMACE OF THE ORIGINAL MAX PAYNE

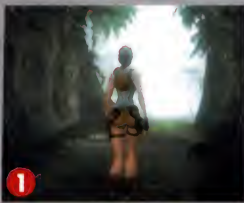
The face of New York's famous painkiller-guzzling cop-on-the-edge – forever locked in a strained rictus – was modelled on the game's writer Sam Lake (aka S4mi Järvi). Lake also dressed up as Max for the game's stylised graphic-novel cut-scenes. **PCZ**



PCZONE
CHARTS

ChartTrack

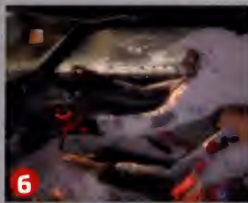
- 1 **NEW** **TOMB RAIDER: ANNIVERSARY**
Issue 182 83%
- 2 **↓** **COMMAND & CONQUER 3: TIBERIUM WARS**
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- 3 **↓** **FOOTBALL MANAGER 2007**
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- 10 **↓** **THE SIMS 2**
Issue 147 82%
- 11 **NEW** **HALO 2**
Issue 182 60%
- 12 **↓** **THE SIMS 2: PETS**
Issue 176 72%
- 13 **NEW** **HOSPITAL TYCOON**
Issue 183 47%
- 14 **—** **THE COMPLETE COLLECTION OF THE SIMS**
Issue 165 N/A
- 15 **↑** **THE SIMS 2: OPEN FOR BUSINESS**
Issue 166 72%
- 16 **↓** **BATTLEFIELD 2142**
Issue 174 86%
- 17 **↓** **THE SIMS: LIFE STORIES**
Issue 181 57%
- 18 **↓** **THE ELDER SCROLLS IV: OBLIVION**
Issue 167 95%
- 19 **↓** **ANCIENT WARS: SPARTA**
Issue 182 72%
- 20 **↓** **SUPREME COMMANDER**
Issue 179 88%

**TOMB RAIDER:
ANNIVERSARY**

Lara's jubbies still manage to shift many copies of this surprisingly good platform adventure.

**HALO 2**

We're actually amazed that Vista has enough of a user base to see *Halo 2* just shy of the top ten. It's still arse, though.

**COLIN MCRAE: DIRT**

That McRae fella does nothing but sit on his arse these days, but still gets credit for being a rally driver. It's just not fair.

**HOSPITAL TYCOON**

Everybody wanted it to be *Theme Hospital*, but it turns out just to be arse hospital. Nurse, bring us our Vicodin – straight away!



The Care Bears' world tour spread a lot of love.



Looks a bit more 'fantasy' than 'football'.



The game's looking pretty – no footballs in it yet, though.

FOOTBALL-MAD

Live the life of Rooney with *Football Superstars*

www.footballsUPERSTARS.com | ETA: Q1 2008

ENTIRELY THE PIZZAZZ-fuelled yin to the stat-driven yang of *Football Manager Live*, and set to arrive at around the same time, is *Football Superstars*. An MMO which, if it lives up to what UK-based developers CyberSports are claiming, could drag online gaming kicking and screaming away from elves and spacemen.

Essentially you'll control a footballer both off and on the pitch – from the perspective of said footballer. Taking you from three-a-side kickabouts in virtual parks all the way through to professional matches in vast stadiums, the game will also enable you to experience some of the off-pitch wealth and high jinks of a Premiership footballer – even if stuffing two coked-up leggy blondes into

a limo at four in the morning is an unlikely feature.

Whether or not CyberSports can realise their lofty ambitions remains to be seen – but the very idea of forming your own teams with friends and working your way up the ranks to the pinnacle of the game's championships could well be a boyhood dream fulfilled. It's all thoroughly feasible – but just how will the football action itself match up to the real thing? And won't everyone want to be star strikers, rather than being part of the boring, yet necessary, solid and dependable back four?

We'll delve deeper into *Football Superstars* in an attempt to ascertain whether it's a Roy of the Rovers or a Billy the Fish for next issue. Something has to fill the void before next season, after all.

IN THE SPOTLIGHT:

The man administering Painkiller: Overdose

MIKE ADAMS - PRODUCER AT DREAMCATCHER GAMES



In the downtime between now and the release of *Painkiller 2*, the *Serious Sam*-style violence will continue with *Painkiller: Overdose*, a standalone expansion for the unrelenting hell-based shooter. A severely jet-lagged Mike Adams - the man who makes Lucifer's hooves fly off with sheer terror - lets us know what's going down...

So what's the story behind *Overdose*?

"Well, *Overdose* picks up where *Painkiller* left off. Sammael and Lucifer have captured Daniel, the player, and Sammael assumes that Lucifer has killed him. Lucifer's actually kept him captive, though, hoping to take all of his powers. When Daniel manages to kill Lucifer, he's freed, and is now seeking revenge against everyone."

Everyone, eh? Like Vikings? And crippled war veterans?

"Yes. We've also designed a map called Slaughterhouse that has animals. So there's chickens, weird pigs that are part-pig, part... whatever. We've got a World War I level too, with biplanes, soldiers and airships."

What content can we expect?

"There are going to be six new weapons, like the demon head, which screams to stun enemies and then launches a fire-beam from its mouth. Old favourites like the stake gun and the Painkiller weapon itself will be in there too. There'll be 14 new levels, 40 new monsters and like with the first game, it'll be broken up into chapters."

Will we see more giant bosses?

"*Overdose* will feature three chapters with three new bosses. Also, for multiplayer we're hopefully going to have six to eight new levels, on top of the multiplayer levels from *Painkiller*. *Painkiller*'s multiplayer was very popular, so we're putting a lot of effort into the online maps."



Multiplayer maps a gogo.



Bad soldiers: all in hell now.



What your grandad saw in the war.



It's even got weird pigs in it.

tat Zone

Our tat has performed an illegal operation and needs to be bought

If you can keep your USB gadgets, when all about you are losing theirs, and blaming it on you. If you can wear a *Lost Planet* T-shirt, when all men doubt you, but still look rather cool. If you can meet with Lara and *Max Payne* merchandise, and treat those two impostors just the same. If you can make one heap of all your tat, and risk it all on one turn of a strategy game. Yours is our tatbox, and everything in it, and what's more, you'll be doing charity a favour, my son.

Buy our tat at www.ebay.co.uk
All proceeds go to charity. Honest.
www.entertainmentsoftwarecharity.org



THIS MONTH'S TAT



SID MEIER HAT
Celebrating *Railroads!*, looking like a train driver and head warmth.



USB POLE DANCER
She'll dance to music, and interviews with German developers.



GAME DESIGN BOOK
The secrets of making games, all contained within one handy tome.



WOW MURLOC KEYRING
Actually desirable, official merch from Korea!

THE TAT BOARD

COMPARE	ITEM TITLE	SOLD FOR	BIDS
	WOW CARDS A sale slightly hampered by the fact that we only had four cards endlessly repeated. Not a killer deck...	£2.19	5
	MONSTER MADNESS BEANIE A stellar sale clearly guaranteed by its previous wearer.	£20	9
	LOST PLANET T-SHIRT Not a planet T-shirt that's been lost, but the other one.	£10.50	10
	USB HAMSTER WHEEL Always running, but never getting anywhere. And only slightly desirable on eBay. Poor, poor hammie.	£6.49	6



Dear Steve,

You know what I hate? *Lego Star Wars*. Yes, the games are gently amusing, but they're also badly designed. And worst of all, they're just fascinated with that most vile of gaming traditions: 'collecting crap for no apparent reason, apart from the myth that small children like collecting things'. Who wants to pile time and effort into a game, just to unlock a crap character or see some early design work? Dull! Boring! Next!

Will Porter

Dear Will,

That most vile of gaming traditions? It's that very tradition that forms the cornerstone of all things good. I love collecting crap! In *Rogue Squadron*, you collect medals for taking out TIE Fighters, in *KOTOR* you've got nothing. They should be hiding collectable Force Medallions under random sheets of cloth throughout the game. It's compulsive when done properly, and keeps my OCD-addled brain satisfied.

Steve Hogarty

Dear Steve,

It's just dull Steve. Meaningless drudgery to elongate the shelf-life of a short game. Take a subject close to both our hearts: *Psychonauts*. Was it worth collecting those stupid figments, opening those daft emotional baggage cases or using that damned metal detector? No! It was a crap feature crowbarred in to appeal to morons... WP

Dear Will,

The tat-foraging in *Psychonauts* was fun, especially collecting the emotional baggage. Even if the joy of seeing a holdall or sports bag smile having been reunited with its tag doesn't please you, the sense of completion should. The pleasure of 'getting everything' on a level is something very few games can offer. I'm a '100%-er' and proud, even if it made me progress through *Psychonauts* at 10% speed. SH

Dear Steve,

If you're suckered by this virus that's infecting gaming, then you're an even more clueless magpie-minded chump than I took you for. Name one advantage you've ever received from collecting shiny icons and watching a percentage crawling inexorably up to, but never actually reaching, 100%. WP

Dear Will,

Bragging rights, and brilliant, hidden prizes you'll never see. SH

Dear Steve,

They're doing this because they think that we're idiots Steve. And your warped, immature and Pokémon-addled mind isn't doing much for the cause of sanity. Bragging rights generally need someone who gives a shit to use them on. WP



Drop the *SimCity* name and maybe this will be easier to swallow.

Right-wing societies are more overcast.



"YOU KILLED SIM CITY!"

Claims one forum member of *SimCity Societies*

simcity.ea.com | ETA: November

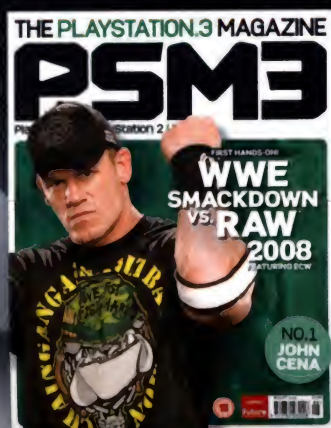
A LOW-FREQUENCY groan can be heard across the internet. The reason? *SimCity Societies* – in particular, the fact that EA have taken the legendary series' reins out of Maxis' hands and placed them into *Caesar 4* developer Tilted Mill's uninitiated grip. And as anybody who's even remotely aware of how the mind of the internet works, a change of developers for such a fundamentally important franchise is more than enough to kindle unfounded hatred in the hearts of fansite patrons.

Having seen what Tilted Mill have done with *SimCity Societies* though, we can safely say that this is not *SimCity*. It's a game that has far more in common with Tilted Mill's previous projects than with anything the *SimCity* series has seen. There's no planning of residential and commercial

zones, no laying of pipes and cables, and no little mayor giving you tips. Instead, it's dragging and dropping prefab houses and businesses on to a map. Palatial homes, corrupt police stations, coffee bars – the buildings are chosen by you, and affect the kind of people who live in your city. This urban 'persona' is reflected in the music and detail of your city too – create an Orwellian society and the street lamps sport CCTV cameras. However, with such unsubtle building types as the Ministry of Thought building, we fear the game might lack the cleverness we so desire.

Early days yet, but EA have started Tilted Mill on an uphill struggle that may prove hard to overcome. The *SimCity* name is a burden they really could have done without – *Societies* is working in the shadow of a much-loved series.

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THIS MONTH: THE FUTURE OF F.E.A.R.

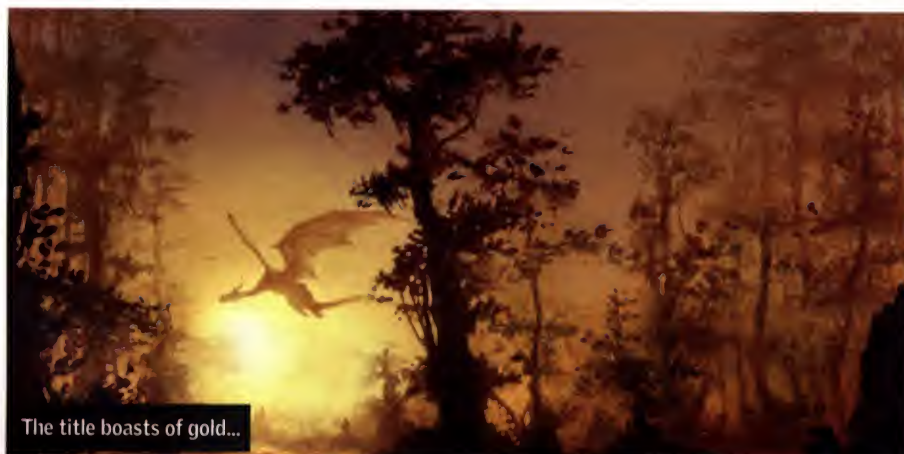
The future of Alma, her of bloody feet and psychic presence, is a strange one indeed. After *F.E.A.R.* creators Monolith got absorbed into the hulk of Warner Brothers, they were left with the rights to put their characters in a sequel, while ex-publishers Vivendi got freedom to do expansion packs under the *F.E.A.R.* banner with the existing characters, and the potential of doing officially tagged *F.E.A.R.* sequels without. The non-official (official) Monolith sequel is now well on its way – with a contest for fans to name their new game at nameyourfear.com that breeds hype as well as an understanding of exactly what's going on with the franchise.

It's an odd situation, compounded by the fact that Vivendi's *Extraction Point* expansion seemed to monkey around with the plot-line, reincarnating fraternal cannibal Paxton Fettel, killing off half the *F.E.A.R.* team and revealing that fat-boy Norton Mapes had not only recovered from a bullet wound, but also outrun a nuclear explosion. With *F.E.A.R.* now an established brand on PC and console, meanwhile, Vivendi would be fools not to continue using the franchise, meaning the situation could become even more confused with a

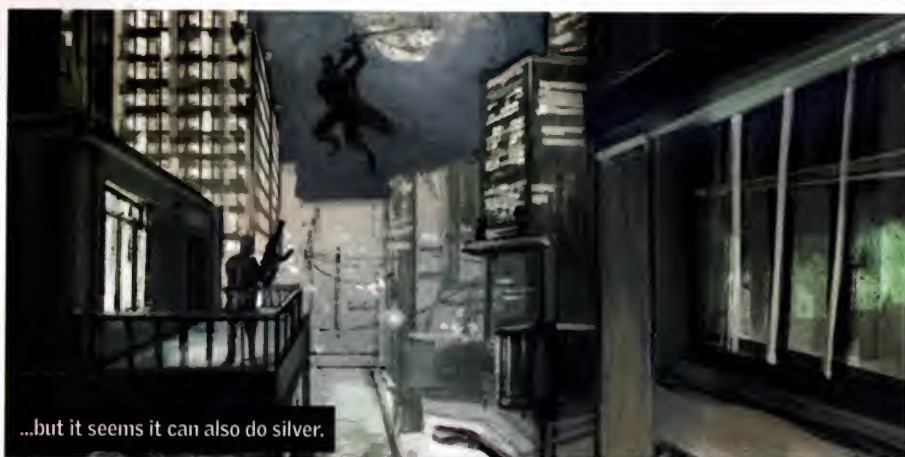
Vivendi own-brand official (non-official) sequel. Effectively creating two parallel sequels to what was once the same game.

It's a potential *Never Say Never Again* situation, where in 1983 an official Bond film (*Octopussy*) and a non-official rehash of *Thunderball* competed for audiences. I mean, after all the fuss over who had control over *Half-Life 2*, what would've happened if Vivendi had been left with the power to produce products with the HL label? I won't judge, but I'm glad I'm not living in that parallel dimension.

As it is, Monolith's direction appears to be further Alma-action within a wrecked city – full of seas of blood and ruined playgrounds. Can we read into this a break from corridors and a departure into fresh air? Here's hoping...

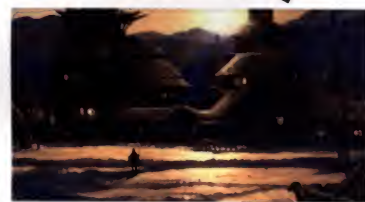


The title boasts of gold...



...but it seems it can also do silver.

SPECTOR WOOS, COOLNESS ACCRUES



Ninja Gold had us at 'hello', and again at 'ninja'

www.junctionpoint.com | ETA: TBA

John Woo, the massively respected Chinese film director who invented holding a gun in each hand and jumping in slow motion, is working with Warren Spector, creator of *Deus Ex*, on a game and movie project titled *Ninja Gold*. Expect the inclusion of modern-day ninjas; something that clocks in on the list of 'things the internet thinks are cool' between 'pirates' and 'pirate ninjas'.

Details are vague, but a quick click around the Spector-founded Junction Point Studio website reveals no less than four pieces of fantasy-minded concept art. JPS were already known to be working on one unspecified fantasy title in the Source engine, but the inclusion of a modern-day ninja in one of these pieces of artwork might suggest that *Unspecified Fantasy Romp* and *Ninja Gold* are one and the same.

Wild speculation here too, but it could be all about a time-travelling ninja who has to dart between modern times and feudal Japan in order to achieve something. Something to do with Yakuza gold smuggling.

"He wanted to do something involving traditional ninjas in a modern-day setting," said the *Deus Ex* creator when asked about Woo's involvement. "The idea just resonated with me. I was intrigued with the idea of what happens when the traditional and the contemporary come into conflict."

While Woo's role in this collaboration indicates that *Ninja Gold* will be appearing in Odeons across the country in the future, it's yet to be confirmed that Spector's interest will 100% ensure a game. But with JPS art guys already drawing time-travelling ninjas, we can tell which way the wind is blowing.

TAKE A FRESH LOOK AT HOLLYWOOD

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TRANSFORMERS EXCLUSIVE PAGE 56

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**COMING
SOON...**

THE WITCHER

Steve Hogarty samples a slice of hot Polish RPG...DEVELOPER CDProjekt PUBLISHER Atari WEBSITE www.thewitcher.com PREVIOUSLY IN... 180**THE LOWDOWN**

Based on a popular series of fantasy books



60-80 hours of gameplay



Day/night/weather cycles are very pretty



Combat is 'interesting'



Combat is a bit too 'clicky'



LAST MONTH, A Polish man woke up from a 19-year coma to find that the communist system he'd once known had fallen to pieces, and that democracy was providing a better way of life for everybody but his poor wife who kept having to flip him in his bed every two hours. What he didn't do, was point at *The Witcher* developer CDProjekt's offices and exclaim: "Poland's making hot RPGs now? What's an RPG?"

The Witcher is a hot RPG, resonating on similar frequencies to *Oblivion* and *Fable*, with its open-ended world, badass main character (Gerald, monster-killer and eponymous Witcher), time-sapping main quest to trounce and terrifying number of distracting side-missions in which to wallow.

When we bluntly asked CDProjekt's chief designer Michal Madej what was so special about this particular RPG, he confidently slid a pen drive of save-games from a hidden coat pocket, and demonstrated.

"RPGs are becoming more and more about player choice," he explained. However, what many people do is save the game before such choices, and probe both outcomes for the one that tends to favour them more. Whichever choice gives the player a bigger sword becomes the choice they make – effectively negating choice altogether.

DEAL OR NO DEAL?

The Witcher handles things a different way. Tasked with protecting some lakeside crates from rogue attacks in the night, you encounter an elf, who wants to trade for the crates, which are full of lovely weapons, rather than fight over them. At this point Madej turned to me and asked what I would do, if I were a Witcher, and this elf had just said that to me.

"I would kill the elf?" I ventured. No sooner had I finished the sentence had Madej floored the enterprising elf, and begun loading a save-game further into the title. Quite a bit further in, as it

turns out, many hours down the line.

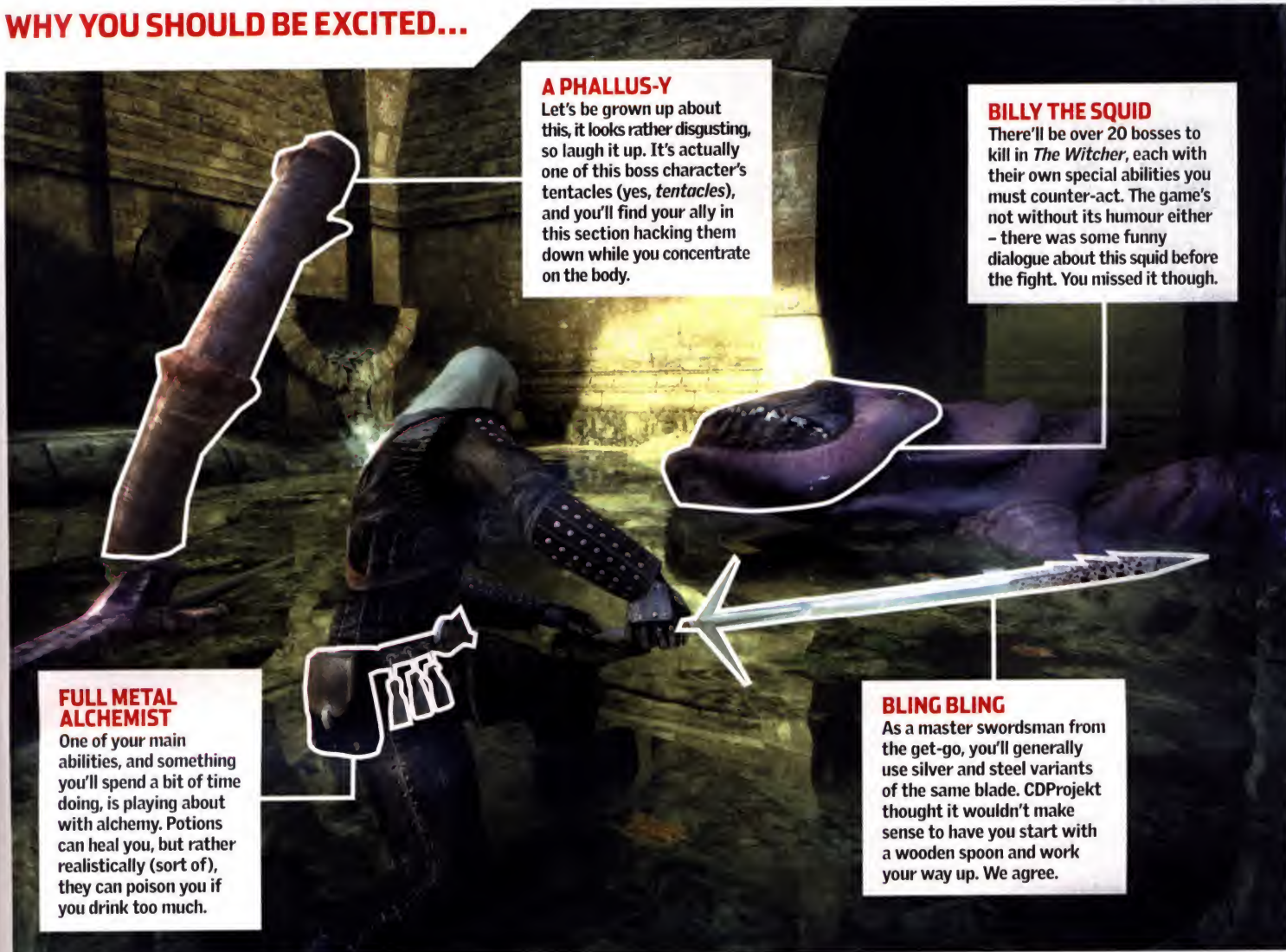
Your choices in *The Witcher* are of the variety that come back to haunt. The consequences linger behind the scenes for a long while before finally descending on you – there's no convenient way to go back and make a different choice without losing a good chunk of your time.

The butterfly effect of killing that elf culminated in the death of an ally later on, and just to show me what I could have won, Madej leapt to an alternate timeline in which I'd traded the crates. In this instance, my ally was alive, but the weapons I'd sold were used in a vicious terrorist attack.

We're interested to see exactly how frequent and far-reaching these consequences are, because we're aware of how much of a logistical nightmare it would be to develop so many differing story arcs. It's something we won't know until we've got full preview code sliding into our disc drives, but either way this could be one of the least-shit games of 2007. Put that on your box.

**ETA
SEPT**

WHY YOU SHOULD BE EXCITED...



A PHALLUS-Y

Let's be grown up about this, it looks rather disgusting, so laugh it up. It's actually one of this boss character's tentacles (yes, *tentacles*), and you'll find your ally in this section hacking them down while you concentrate on the body.

BILLY THE SQUID

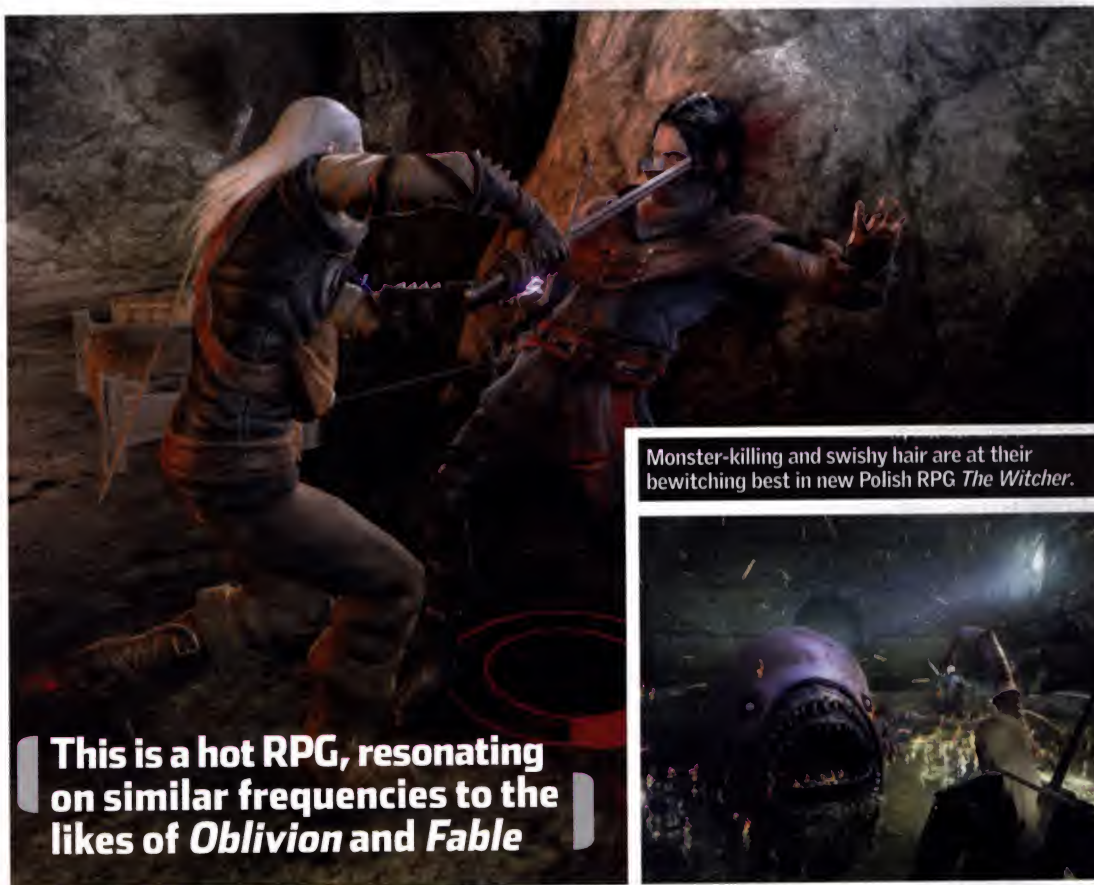
There'll be over 20 bosses to kill in *The Witcher*, each with their own special abilities you must counter-act. The game's not without its humour either – there was some funny dialogue about this squid before the fight. You missed it though.

FULL METAL ALCHEMIST

One of your main abilities, and something you'll spend a bit of time doing, is playing about with alchemy. Potions can heal you, but rather realistically (sort of), they can poison you if you drink too much.

BLING BLING

As a master swordsman from the get-go, you'll generally use silver and steel variants of the same blade. CDProjekt thought it wouldn't make sense to have you start with a wooden spoon and work your way up. We agree.



Monster-killing and swishy hair are at their bewitching best in new Polish RPG *The Witcher*.



This is a hot RPG, resonating on similar frequencies to the likes of *Oblivion* and *Fable*

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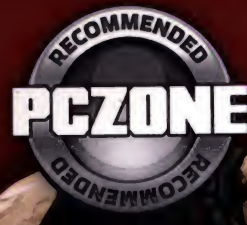
GUILD WARS: PROPHECIES

A stunning fantasy online role-playing game that's easy to pick up and play, but also has huge depth and immersion.



GUILD WARS: FACTIONS

The second unmissable chapter of the Guild Wars MMO features a beautiful new Oriental setting and new characters such as the assassin.



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Jamie Sefton

Jamie Sefton
Editor

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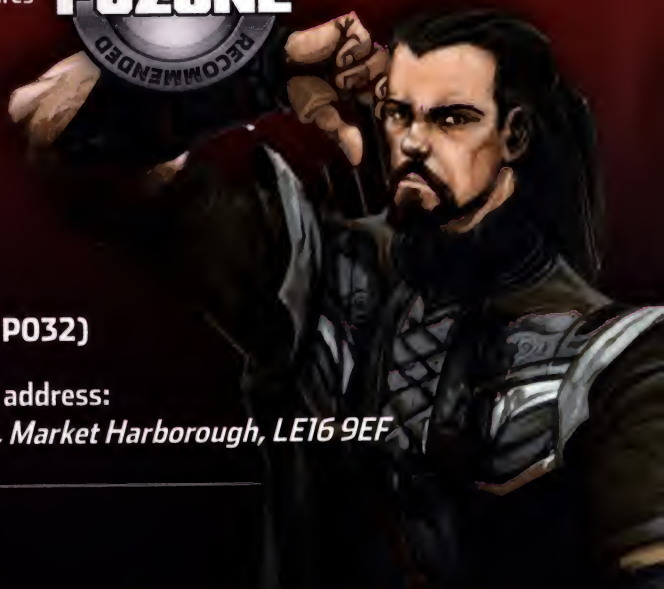
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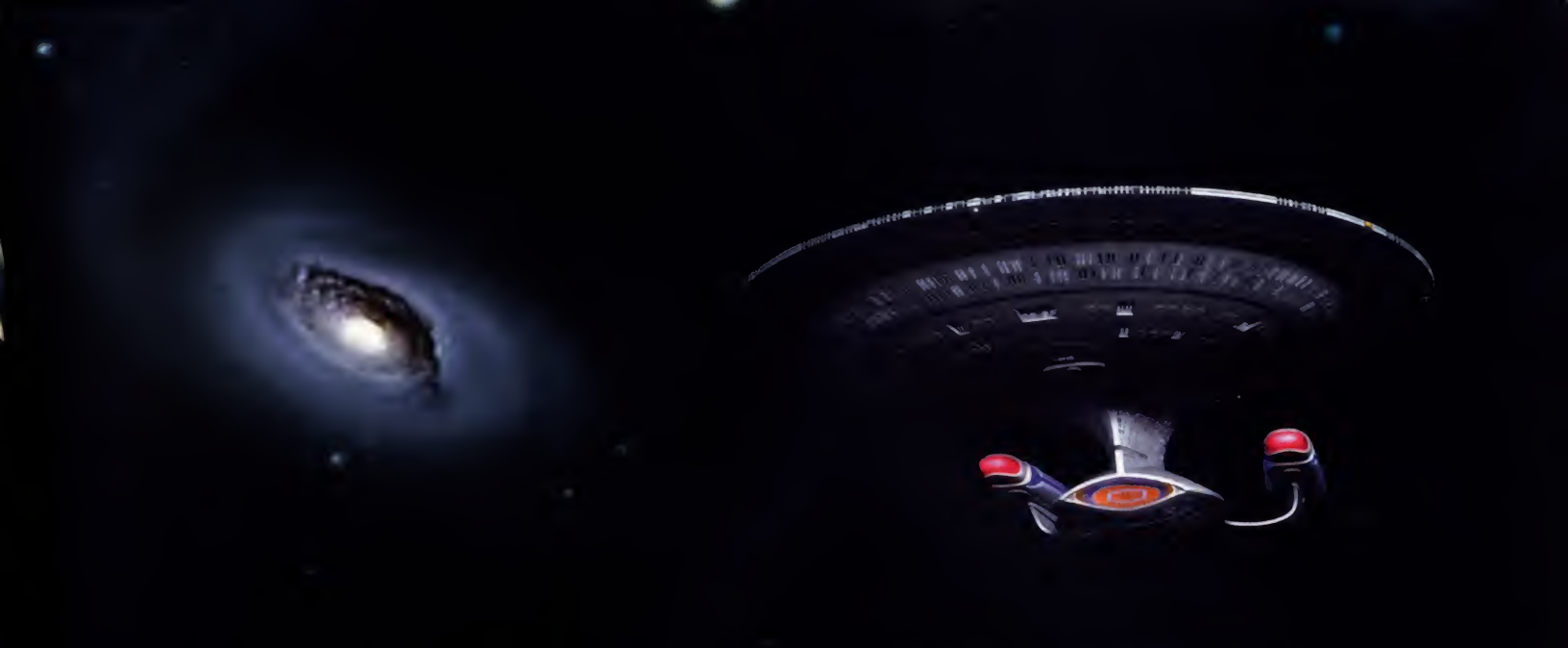


UPFRONT **FEATURE**

BRAVE NEW WORLDS

SCI-FI SPECIAL

PC ZONE takes a deep breath and gazes into humanity's future. It's not pretty...



Dan Griliopoulos explains just why sci-fi lies at the heart of PC gaming...

WHY DO GAMERS like science fiction? It's not simply escapism, as many different things provide escapism: nostalgia, movies, music... It's not simply guns, because World War II and Vietnam have guns. It's not simply fun, because sunshine and movies and LOLcats are all fun. I'd argue it's even more than a combination of all of those things. Except the LOLcats maybe.

Proper, hard science fiction is "realistic speculation about possible future events," to quote esteemed sci-fi author Robert Heinlein. This is, however, rarely included in science-fiction games or science fiction, except as a plot macguffin; very little science fiction is hard sci-fi, and almost no game science-fiction is. *Fallout* is an example of hard sci-fi, altering a single variable in the world (a nuclear war) along believable lines and speculating what the outcome might be.

FANTASY WORLD

Most games, though, are closer to science fantasy than science fiction; they're 'space opera', like *Star Trek*, where a bunch of fundamentally unrealistic assumptions are made (faster-than-light travel and consistently bipedal aliens, for example). *Half-Life 2* may refer to String Theory and the Calabi-Yau Model, but these are throwaway psychobabble, to go with its magic guns and time-warping, physiologically impossible aliens. Look at *UT3*'s ludicrous storyline that was built to fit around its respawning system, or *Prey*'s arbitrary gravity, and you'll realise there's no science in the fiction.

But just because most game sci-fi doesn't meet the high standards of reality, it doesn't mean that it's meaningless escapism. In a lot of cases, supposedly 'soft' science fiction becomes a set of thought experiments –

where you ask the question: 'If we assume a flawed bunch of chaps like us have cracked faster-than-light travel, what then? How would we undoubtedly bugger up this new age of humanity?'

CLOSER TO TRUTH

This brand of science fiction can also provide parallels with our own lives, and make us look at familiar problems in new ways. Think of the way the TV series *Battlestar Galactica* had the planet of Kobol as an indirect representation of Iraq and then justified suicide-bombing against an occupying force. Just how shocking must that have been to Americans?

Good sci-fi lets people directly tackle controversial issues, while keeping moral outrage at bay – cocooned in a fantasy land that may or may not be meant for viewers or gamers to take seriously. It isn't something 2K Games will be putting on *BioShock*'s box, but being faced with a decision of whether to murder a small child for personal gain is a subject matter that could only be approached in the realms of fantasy or science fiction. It clearly touches on the feelings of any right-minded individual's abhorrence of child abuse, and would cause outrage if portrayed in any other setting.

Good sci-fi also sees the shoots of what's happening in the world today and nurtures them; pushing today's trends into the realm of tomorrow to see what they may have become by then. So *Deus Ex* takes terrorism, cybernetics and a bunch of conspiracy theories, and remakes an RPG world in that image. *Battlefield 2142* extrapolates from global warming, to the theory of global cooling, and ties this to a logical increase in the focus and mobility of armed forces. Even the dumbshow that was *Doom 3* talked about the dangers of amoral global


corporations getting bigger than governments. The *Fallout* series looks back to the golden age of paranoia, the 1950s, and asks what the world would be like if the Cold War had gone hot.

Meanwhile, *Galactic Civilisations* gives a very broadstrokes picture of how mankind might join an intergalactic community, following in the footsteps of some of the oldest sci-fi, Olaf Stapledon's *First And Last Men*.

FLY, ZAP, KA-BOOM!

Of course, sci-fi isn't just educational; it's entertaining! It gives room for enormous special effects and battles on global or galactic scales. It allows people to have superheroic powers, to communicate across huge distances, to have unlikely-looking creatures to fight or befriend.

So why, if sci-fi is so ace, isn't it bigger in media other than games? Well, a lot of the time big films are sci-fi; witness *Star Wars*, *Terminator* and *The Matrix*; but more often than not, it's just not referred to as sci-fi. Think of the way people are happier to read *Harry Potter* when it's classified as kid's fiction, than when it's classified as fantasy. They're even happier when you put a serious-looking book cover on a book rather than sci-fi art. *Dr Strangelove*, *Jurassic Park*, *The Handmaid's Tale*; all of these are science fiction.

Perhaps people simply have an aversion to sci-fi in the West because there's a social stigma attached to it: it's seen as nerdy. Thankfully, as gamers we already have the stigma of being violent and immature, so being nerdy isn't such a concern. At least science-fiction games mean we're learning and thinking about how the world works and changes. Plus, we're getting to shoot some very big scary monsters at the same time. 

FLASH GORDON



Valve writer Marc Laidlaw talks about the relationship between science fiction, gaming and a certain scientist shooter...

HAVING WRITTEN **SCI-FI** and horror novels such as *Dad's Nuke*, *The Orchid Eater* and *The 37th Mandala*, Marc Laidlaw joined Valve in 1997 during the development of the original *Half-Life*. He's a charming chap, and given the opportunity to speak on his specialist subject he does so perceptively and at great length. Who better, then, to fire questions at in our sci-fi spectacular issue?

Spoiler: this bridge may explode...



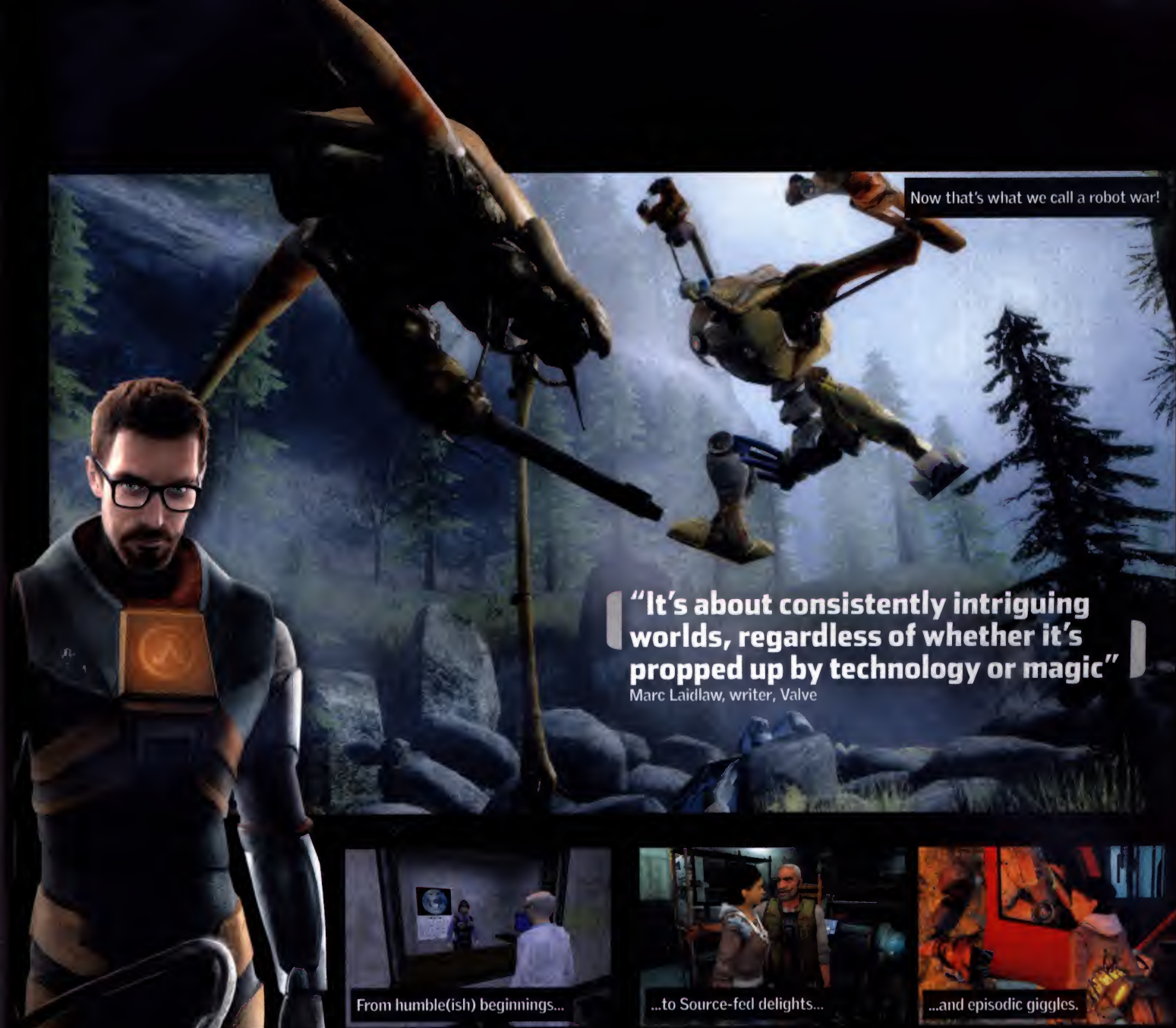
Q How is it that you've wound up working in the sci-fi medium instead of, say, writing political thrillers or tales of romance?

A "I've always wanted to be a writer of the fantastic. My mum read to me from *The Martian Chronicles* and *The Lord Of The Rings*; my dad sent me off to sleep with Poe's *The Black Cat* and *The Tell-Tale Heart*. I was more interested in writing horror than science fiction; when I tried to imagine anything with an SF setting, I pictured boring spaceships with linoleum corridors (which is to say, *Star Trek*). But in the late '70s and early '80s the market for horror was swamped to overflowing with Stephen King imitators (ignoring the fact that Stephen King was more than able to fill a swamp all on his own). The late James Turner, then editor of Arkham House, advised me that if I took some of that horror sensibility and applied it to SF, I'd be likelier to come up with something

original. This gave me a more personal angle on writing science fiction. My favourite sort of SF is satirical, dystopian fiction, fairly bleak – a classic mode of SF, but only marginally saleable."

How do you keep *Half-Life* characters 'real' while all the technological whizz-bangs and G-Man mysteries are flying around them?

"We try to draw strong relationships between the characters; making each one part of a believable network of family and friends (and rivals) makes it easier for players to relate to them. Characters in weaker science-fiction stories often seem flimsy because they're solitary heroic figures without parents, siblings or ordinary relationships. Character-driven drama depends on social context, status transactions, how they relate to other people in their world. We also assume our characters have spent their whole life in this world – especially Alyx, who grew up surrounded by headcrabs and Vortigaunts. The crazy SF details are just



Now that's what we call a robot war!

"It's about consistently intriguing worlds, regardless of whether it's propped up by technology or magic"

Marc Laidlaw, writer, Valve



From humble(ish) beginnings...



...to Source-fed delights...



...and episodic giggles.

ordinary obstacles to them – still full of potential threats and surprises, as in our own world, but with a grim internal logic."

Ask any game developer to name a major inspiration and they'll say "Star Wars". Is this a blessing or a curse?

"For me it's a curse. I hate *Star Wars* and don't have to feign a blank look when other members of the team say things like 'Hoth' or 'Jar Jar the Hut'. It's never in my mind as something to emulate. The first movie was a huge let-down once the opening spaceships had flown past. Compared to the stuff I was reading in 1977, the works that defined science fiction for me (the New Wave writers who'd strode forth from *New Worlds* and *Dangerous Visions*), everything in *Star Wars* was old space helmet. But there's no question it dragged some of the most lurid pulp SF clichés into the mainstream and purveyors of pop entertainment have been wallowing in it ever since.

Forbidden Planet, a much purer purveyor of pulp magic, is my *Star Wars*."

So, *Half-Life* aside, what games have you played that have really put some meat onto the bones of sci-fi gaming?

"SF in games tends to turn on imagery of armour-plated oafs and shiny warships. The dark satiric or dystopian futures I prefer have been few and far between, and don't necessarily give rise to games that I care to spend the requisite 40-60 hours beating. I'm more inclined to sink into fantasy realms, with my critical faculties numbed by the sight of pretty purple hills in the distance. Which is to say, it's less about the games being rigorously imagined SF and more about consistently intriguing worlds, regardless of whether the enterprise is propped up by technology or magic. Retro's *Metroid Prime* games have done fantastic things with atmosphere and environment, and with creatures that

evoke an opaque alien disinterest in my feeble human aspirations. They want only to feed on my neurotransmitters, and I love them for that."

An obvious outing for the *Half-Life* universe would be a movie. Would this work? Do you think it'll ever happen?

"This project always crashes up against the hard reality that Gordon Freeman is a cipher – a Teflon conduit for the player's senses. As soon as you try to turn him into an actual character separate from the player's will, he loses whatever it is that makes him an interesting first-person-game protagonist. Anybody from outside Valve who gets a hold of the project instantly turns Gordon Freeman into the perfect starring vehicle for that week's top celebrity, and the arbitrary changes just get worse from there. Even if Valve make the movie independently, we would have to solve the Freeman character dilemma – but at least

I believe we would solve it in such a way that it would be true to the rest of our vision. The first *Half-Life* movie treatment pitched to us climaxed with a tearful reunion between enslaved Vortigaunts and their Vortiwives and children. The last one I saw had Black Mesa invaded by a cavalry unit, just so as to feature a scene of bullsquids tearing into armoured horses... Which I admit is sort of cool, but has nothing to do with *Half-Life*."

What do you reckon the actual chances of us having to live in a bleak Orwellian nightmare in the next couple of years are?

"Roughly the same as the odds of Conan the Barbarian becoming the governor of California." **PCZ**

For the complete version of this interview, visit www.pczone.co.uk

SPACE SIEGE

Martin Korda talks to games development legend Chris Taylor about his forthcoming space-based RPG epic...

DEVELOPER Gas Powered Games PUBLISHER Sega WEBSITE www.gaspowered.com

ETA
2008

IT'S AN IMPRESSIVE list. *Total Annihilation. Dungeon Siege. Supreme Commander.* So it's hardly surprising that, as the first tantalising titbits of information trickle into our inboxes on a rainy morning, proclaiming that games development legend Chris Taylor (the man behind these three PC gaming leviathans) is working on a brand-new space-based RPG called *Space Siege*, we're tripping over our shoelaces to speak to him.

Fast-forward eight hours. After a day of RSI-inducing thumb twiddling waiting for Seattle-based Taylor to speak to me, I finally get to chat to him in his private office, rumoured to be situated in a giant robot-shaped tower made entirely of diamonds. Also joining us is lead designer Daniel Achterman, who doesn't have any kind of rumours circulating about his office, but does know enough about *Space Siege* to fill two and half encyclopaedias. Large ones. With reinforced spines.

Pepped up on a caffeine kick that would kill a bull-elephant, Taylor is eager to dive straight in. Staying true to the frenetic action-RPG formula that brought Gas Powered Games such success with the *Dungeon Siege* series, he informs me that *Space Siege* is an

intergalactic action-romp that sees humanity battling for survival against a terrifying alien race that could peel a man like a monkey would a ripe banana.

WALK THE WALK

Stepping into the gravity boots of human hero Seth Walker – a combat engineer onboard a city-sized space cruiser called The Armstrong – you'll be tasked with single-handedly fighting off hordes of aliens in an attempt to save the last dregs of humanity from annihilation. And there you were thinking that you'd just have to mend a couple of hover-tanks before taking an extended lunch break and knocking off early for a session down the boozer.

While *Space Siege* will be frenetic, pacing is also set to play a major role. "In *Dungeon Siege*, it was all about using melee and spells to push through tons of enemies," explains Taylor. "Space Siege's combat is far more tactical. You'll go into situations where you encounter aliens and you won't just take out your biggest gun and start blasting them. There'll be combat that's as frenzied as you saw in *Dungeon Siege*, only there'll be far better pacing this time around. One minute you may be involved in a really intense battle, the next in one that requires strategy."

Aiding you in your critical mission will be a brand-new control system, which Taylor believes will trump even

the legendary *Dungeon Siege* interface. "You won't recognise the interface from *Dungeon Siege*," he promises in a confident timbre. "We're very devoted to simplicity and ease of use so that people won't be overwhelmed. The interface will evolve as you gain abilities and will also allow you to give commands to your HR-V robot – an NPC buddy-character who'll back you up throughout the course of the game."

MAKING A MESS

Taylor would be the first to admit that in the past, plot and characters haven't been his main focus when approaching game design. However, all that's about to change. With the games industry slowly waking up to the power of storytelling and believable, deep characters, Taylor and Achterman believe that they and their team are ready to join the burgeoning number of developers intent on injecting their games with entertaining plots.

"Man has colonised space. The first colony ship to launch from Earth was the ISCS Chrysanthemum in 2056," chimes Achterman, as Taylor sips his 14th coffee of the interview. "Over the next 138 years, 18 other colony ships were sent out, but none of the

THE LOWDOWN

- Heavy emphasis on plot and character development ✓
- Well-paced action infused with a tactical spine ✓
- Cybernetic augmentations ✓
- Your moral choices determine the direction of the game ✓
- May not be hardcore enough for some RPG fans ✗



"One minute you'll be involved in a really tense battle, the next in one that requires strategy"

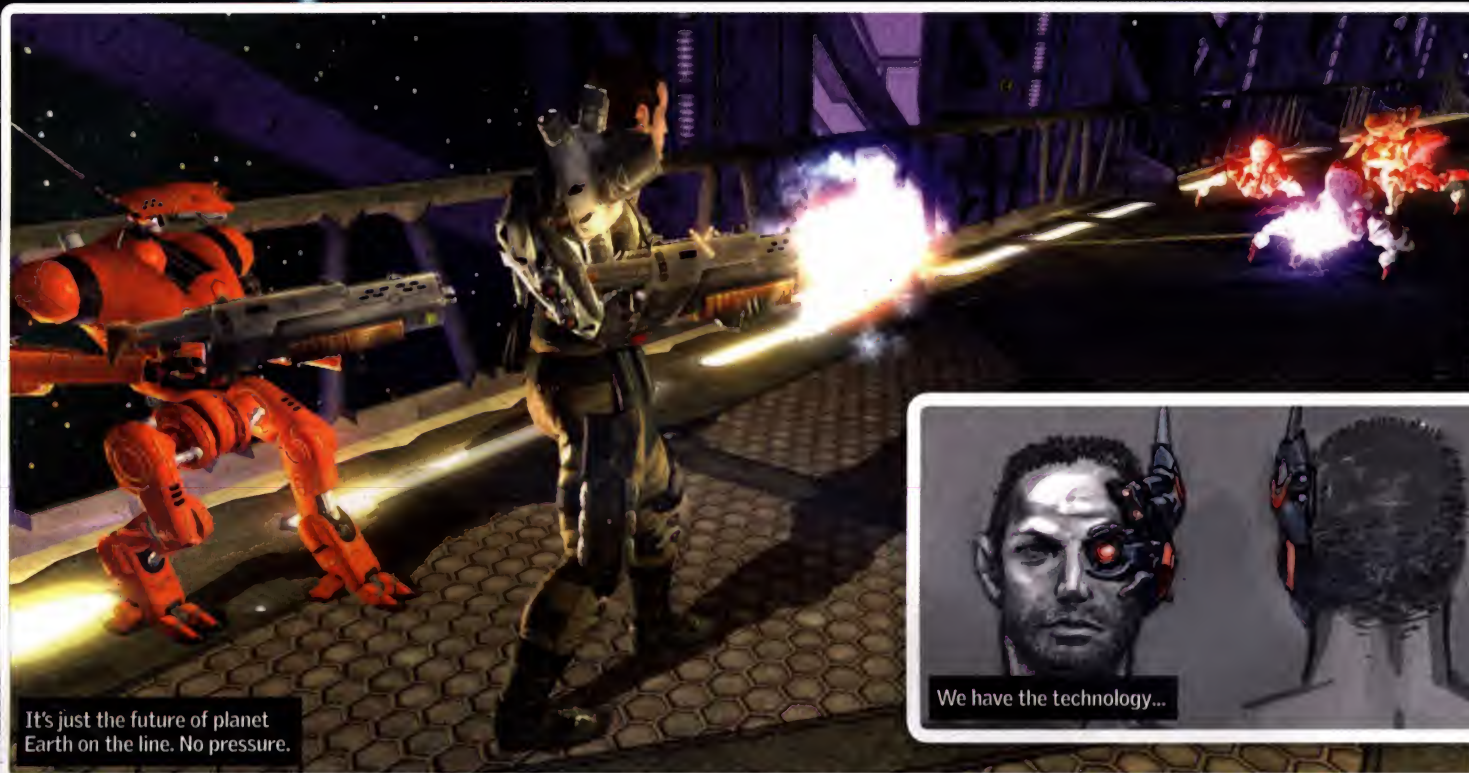
Chris Taylor, CEO & founder, Gas Powered Games



Will you choose to strap on cybernetic implants or maintain your humanity?



Like a scene from *Thriller*, albeit with less shiny white socks.



It's just the future of planet Earth on the line. No pressure.

We have the technology...

"Your enemies are intelligent and brilliant military strategists too"

Daniel Achterman, lead designer, *Space Siege*

A view to a kill

Fully zoomable camera but no DirectX 10

This time the camera will go all the way down.



As you've probably already worked out from the visuals, *Space Siege* is a third-person RPG, just like the *Dungeon Siege* series. However, the *Siege* engine has been totally revamped (the name on the birth certificate is the *Siege Engine 3*) and unlike its hack-and-slash forebears, it'll give you the option to lower the camera right down to ground level in order to attain a full-frontal view of the action.

Packed full of the latest graphical bells and whistles, *Space Siege* is promising to be a visual feast, but somewhat surprisingly, Gas Powered Games has opted to shun DirectX 10 due to a belief that there's currently an inadequate install base and too many technical issues to deal with, which comes as yet another in a series of blows to Microsoft's beleaguered Windows Vista operating system.

ships were successful in establishing a terra-based colony. Instead, upon their arrival to their destination, the colony ships converted into permanent space-stations. Of all the planets initially targeted as colonies, only Elysium IV was capable of supporting human life."

With the humans settled, they waste no time doing what humans do best – stripping the planet of natural resources, pumping the air full of chemicals and filling every TV station with vacuous reality TV programs about housekeeping. Or at least something along those lines. Point is, the colonists end up pissing off the locals – a race of giant alien killers called the Kerak, which bare more than a passing resemblance to the giant bugs from *Starship Troopers* – so much that they wipe out the colonists, then head to Earth to do the same to the rest of humanity. If you've ever seen *Anthea Turner: Perfect Housewife*, you'll no doubt sympathise.

STRONG OF ARM

With Earth on the brink of annihilation, only one human ship full of refugees – The Armstrong – escapes the blanket of Kerak warships pummeling Earth from orbit. "Earth ships are escaping like crazy trying to get off the planet, but the Kerak destroy them," explains

Taylor. "Your ship barely escapes, but the aliens manage to send an invasion force onboard before you get away."

Flying aimlessly into the void commonly referred to as space and with his ship infested with enemies, Seth Walker only has one choice, and I don't mean curling up into a ball and shouting: "We're all gonna die, this is the end, we're all doomed. Whyyyyyy?!" No my friends, his and ultimately your only choice is to pick up a gun and start blasting some bugs.

"Although their appearance suggests otherwise, the Kerak are extremely intelligent, capable of adapting to any

environment and are brilliant military strategists," explains Achterman as I press him about these alien killers.

"There are several types of Kerak warriors and each type fills a specific combat role. Drones swarm their enemies and explode on contact. There are also nimble, armoured skirmishers, bipedal Kerak warriors who can deploy advanced weapon systems and even an invulnerable monstrosity that barrels forward with alarming speed. There's no question that the Kerak are the greatest foe that humanity has ever faced."

But enough about the bugs for now, because I make it about time to talk





Siege united

Team up for a whole new adventure

Multiplayer will provide a unique set of missions.

While Gas Powered Games remain sketchy about *Space Siege*'s multiplayer options, they did divulge that playing online would be a completely separate experience from the single-player campaign. Set to be more modular than its solo counterpart, you'll be charged with creating a brand-new character, and will then be provided with a selection of encounters (drawn from encounters within the main game, but not directly related to the single-player campaign) from which to choose. We also managed to discover that your characters will be persistent, meaning that you'll be able to transfer them over to all of your multiplayer games.

Let's hope robots don't get vertigo.

more about Seth, a character who's a world away from the player-generated heroes that starred in the *Dungeon Siege* adventures.

WALKER SPACE RANGER

"Instead of a generic male or female character, we decided that we wanted a character that you can go through a story with," explains Taylor. "Seth is like our Gordon Freeman, only he'll be able to speak. He has a look and a history and there's something loveable about him."

Being the kind of bloke who likes to moisturise his palms with engine grease, Seth will possess a profusion of technical skills with which to thwart the alien menace. Resisting the temptation to return to *Dungeon Siege*'s use-skill-gain-experience mechanic, Taylor and his team have opted to create a completely new skill system for *Space Siege*. At your disposal will be a collection of abilities that'll provide you with bonuses, including reduced cool-down time for power shots and an increased blast radius for your grenades. It's a system that hints at a far more tactical experience than the frenetic and often mindless mouse-clicking mayhem of its fantasy predecessors.

"The other way that Seth improves is by upgrading and customising his gear," expands Achterman. "He can find various materials in containers, or by defeating enemies, like scraps of metal,



You are Seth Walker, humanity's last hope for survival.

various chemicals and pieces of alien technology. He can use combinations of those materials to upgrade his weapons or armour. Upgrades to damage, armour or critical hit chance all use the same types of materials, so you'll have to choose which upgrades are most important to you."

MORAL CODE

Now for the really exciting part. Bubbling beneath *Space Siege*'s buffed surface, searing action and intergalactic conflict will be a moral vein that centres on morality and humanity. In a twist that would have an '80s perm feeling inadequate, it'll be up to you to decide whether or not you want to equip Seth with a collection of cybernetic upgrades that'll make him a more potent killer. But here's the catch. With a Humanity meter tracking how far away you've strayed from your original soft-tissue self, you'll find that the closer you come to becoming a distant relative to RoboCop, the more estranged you'll become from other humans onboard The Armstrong.

"When you start playing, you'll think you're in a very traditional RPG where your job is to load up your character with armour and weapons, then blast your way through the game," explains Taylor, rejuvenated by caffeine injection no.19 of the morning. "We thought it'd be fun to bring in a moral choice question, to give the player a choice between going down the path of cybernetic upgrades and losing their humanity, or staying human. The more upgrades you install, the more your Humanity meter will go down. As you play through the game, you'll be romanced. You might find a large gun, but you can't carry it because you're not strong enough without cybernetic upgrades. You may need a powerful robotic arm, or a lung upgrade to get through a chamber because the air is too hard



Cyber hero

Squish aliens with some killer strap-ons



CYBERNETIC EYES

Replacing one of Seth's eyes with a mechanical equivalent will give you access to advanced targeting and enemy-tracking skills, as well as beefing up your Critical Hit ability.



MOTIVATOR

This handy augmentation will increase your HR-V robot's speed, meaning he'll be able to come to your aid more swiftly and avoid enemy attacks more nimbly.



CYBERNETIC LEGS

These will allow you to buy the Stationary Stance ability, a skill that involves locking Seth's legs to create a stable firing platform that increases rate of fire and damage.



STEALTH GENERATOR

If you don't fancy strapping on implants, why not slap some upgrades onto your robot instead, such as a stealth generator that masks his presence from enemies.



Space Siege is set to put entertainment first.



Seattle: home to much caffeine, as well as innovative game ideas.

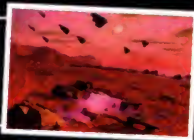


The old 'smear the slope with grease' trick was working well.

THE STORY SO FAR...

GAS POWERED GAMES

Annihilated
Before GPG, Taylor shoots to prominence with international hit *Total Annihilation*.



1997

Siege mentality
The company's debut title, *Dungeon Siege*, takes the RPG world by storm.

2002

Hacking up
Although entertaining, *Dungeon Siege II* gets a solid if unspectacular reception in the media.

2005

Yes, commander
Supreme Commander is one of the most entertaining and intense RTS games of all time.

2007

on human lungs. From a gameplay perspective, the game becomes easier as you lose your humanity. The downside is that the other characters in the game start alienating you. They start treating you like Frankenstein's monster."

I'LL BE BACK

Faced by this moral dilemma, which will feed seamlessly into the branching plot, you'll have to choose between compromising your humanity with these cybernetic implants, losing your mates and spending your evenings alone lubricating your joints with WD40 and making love to a Dyson, or opting for the harder but more morally rewarding route of maintaining your humanity. The latter choice will be akin to Arnold Schwarzenegger taking on the Predator, the former like Terminator vs Predator.

"We're not going down the *Deus Ex* road though," explains Taylor when asked if there'll be any similarities to Warren Spector's RPG classic. "*Space Siege* isn't as hardcore. It's a little more like *World Of Warcraft*. We've realised that the market is changing. Games are entertainment and people don't want to get stuck on games all the time. We want *Space Siege* to appeal to everyone. If you want to

make it more difficult, you'll be able to go down the human path. If you're younger, the moral dilemma may not be so important and you may just want to become a cyborg. More hardcore players will no doubt want to get through the entire game with no augmentations, simply out of principle."

BILLY LOADS-A-MATES

As Taylor alluded to a few moments ago, a supporting cast of characters will aid you in your attempts to thwart the aliens from wiping out the last humans in the universe. Among these will be Gina Reynolds, a foxy communications officer – aka the love interest – a fiercely anti-cybernetic communications officer (you can see the post-coital arguments already). There will also

We imagine this bit will be coloured in.



After humans mess up their planet, the Kerak are hungry for revenge.



Have it, alien scum!



The aliens will have their own hierarchy.



"Space Siege isn't as hardcore. It's a little more like *World Of Warcraft*"

Chris Taylor, CEO & founder, Gas Powered Games

be Dr Edward DeSoto, a cybernetic surgeon; Jake Henderson, a hardened soldier who'd do anything for Seth with the possible exception of giving him his last Rolo; and Frank Murphy, a washed-up alcoholic with a penchant for mechanical repairs.

Despite attempts to siphon more info from Taylor and Achterman, I'm informed my time is up. However, I do manage to extract one last tantalising morsel from them before they leave. Apparently, there'll be another sinister force at work within The Armstrong, which will throw the moral dilemma mentioned earlier wide open. Hmmmm, interesting...

Satiated by enough information to make an android haemorrhage, I bid my farewell to Taylor and Achterman as they head off to one of Seattle's 423,007 coffee bars for a cheeky espresso before cracking on with the game.

While it's still too early to make any concrete calls on how *Space Siege* will turn out, it certainly appears to have the makings of another top-quality title. Given Gas Powered's already impressive collection of hits, *Space Siege*'s strong moral themes and a solid role-playing core, Chris Taylor and his team may soon find themselves with another gem to slap onto their sparkling resumé. **PC7**



GAME OVER MAN!

GAME OVER!

With two *Alien* games on the horizon, *Will Porter* ponders exactly what is lurking within the chests of Gearbox and Obsidian...

AN *ALIEN SHOOTER* is being made at Gearbox, home of *Brothers In Arms*, while simultaneously Obsidian (the largely ex-Black Isle developers responsible for both *KOTOR2* and *NWN2*) have an RPG in the works. Little is known about either, but the fact that there's reported communication between the two development houses suggests a similar timescale, and perhaps even a dovetailing of their plots.

The action game is definitely an *Aliens*-style tale of a marine unit isolated and under fire – to quote Gearbox head honcho Randy Pitchford: "Our game's about becoming a Colonial Marine, and looking at it from the Colonial Marines' perspective." Discussions have likewise been confirmed with both Sigourney Weaver (Ripley) and Lance Henriksen (Bishop) about using their voices and likenesses. Here's what we think could happen in both...

CASE STUDY #1: THE SHOOTER

The setting



Mike Gallo, senior producer at Sega, the publisher of both *Aliens* games, has said neither title will directly follow the storylines of the films – but instead will create an experience inspired by the films' ideas. All well and good, but to breed a feeling of claustrophobia and fear, I find it unlikely that the shooter will take place anywhere other than in a wrecked colony or settlement like that discovered in *Aliens*. One familiar setting with several constituent parts is a certainty, seeing as the shooter is in development at the same time as an RPG that, by its nature, will be visiting more spaced-out, varied settings and environments. A dank, forboding, dripping mess of metal with scattered human survivors is likely; placed above an Alien nest and (probably) a nearby ancient ship that crashlanded due to the alien menace aeons ago. We don't want anything new here. We want *Aliens* loud and proud.

How might it play?



Gearbox have already proved their aptitude for squad combat and order-giving in the *Brothers In Arms* series, so a more blast-friendly version of this can be pretty much guaranteed. Each character with their own speciality weapon, securing a safe area around their dropship before heading out on rescue missions and inevitably being forced back by countless numbers of aliens. Expect plenty of action from auto-turrets, as well as scripted action sequences in those cool massive black military vehicles and turbulent descents in dropships. Has it really been so long since *AvP2*?

Likely characters



Hmmm, lets have a think. A man in charge who's thoroughly out of his depth? A butch female character with a large gun? A green rookie just waiting for the shredder? As for yourself, well you'll presumably be cut out of the Hicks mould – but if Gearbox are brave enough to cast you as a Ripley-style heroine, then kudos should go to them. Man, why did they meaninglessly kill off Newt at the start of *Alien 3*? A grown-up version of her featured in early *Dark Horse* comics, but that was it. A wasted opportunity.



Likely situations



Many of the key *Alien* first-person moments have already been plundered by *AvP2*, but there's no reason not to revisit them. A face-off against an Alien Queen surrounded by her eggs, firing a flame-thrower into a group of cocooned former shipmates begging you to kill them, being low on ammo and hiding from xenomorphs intent on smelling you out... It could be magisterial. Expect a remarkably strong co-op contingent to boot, they're all the rage these days – plus the squad dynamics of *Alien* combat would fit perfectly.

ANY OTHER STAR TURNS?

Again, the return of star talent is probable. Although it would have been nice to get Hicks back, but *again* he was meaninglessly killed off to satisfying the whims of *stupid people* before *Alien 3* had even begun. As for the fellow 20th Century Fox-owned cameo that everyone wants, the Predator, I think hints towards everyone's favourite dreadlocked big-game hunter are inevitable. But if Sega are being wise, they'll be keeping him in cold-storage for a sequel...



CASE STUDY #2: THE ROLE-PLAYER

The setting



The chances are that you'll start out in the pay of the Weyland-Yutani corporation, just as most people in the *Aliens* universe are. To distance your character from those of the shooter however, I sincerely doubt you'll be playing as a soldier – at least not straight from the off. A regular Joe shifting crates around in one of those Power Loaders is likely, or perhaps just a pen-pusher working for the almighty planetary conglomerate – either way you'll be a survivor of a horrifying alien attack at the game's start. From then on, I'd say that being a member of an armed science team attempting to research the alien menace – and yet again secretly abuse it for military ends – is extremely likely.

How might it play?



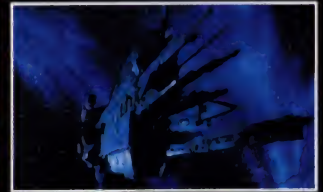
The very nature of a space role-play game will mean that you'll be travelling between planets, but with this being in the vaguely realistic *Alien* universe, you won't be skipping willy-nilly around the galaxy as you do with the hyperdrive-powered *Star Wars* fraternity. To travel between planet systems takes years, and crew members are placed in cryostasis for lengthy periods of time. In terms of the game, this not only raises the chances of getting some unexpected encounters as your ship is boarded, for example, while you sleep, but also creates a neat storytelling dynamic as you catch up on what you've missed and watch NPCs age as you return to former decayed haunts. By necessity, this would make the storyline fairly linear, but would be fascinating nonetheless.

Likely characters



Let's face it, if either your own character or one of your party doesn't turn out to be an android with a secret company-installed agenda, Obsidian will have missed a substantial trick. Otherwise, likely companions are someone who's an Alien/human hybrid, a mistrusted Bishop-style android, a military hardass and a straight-talking company man. Tell you what would be clever though – if both shooter and RPG featured a separate android with the same appearance and voice-actor. Now that would be neat.

Likely situations



If we subscribe to the theory that the shooter will take place in one isolated colony, it'd make sense for the RPG to visit the other typically *Alien* settings scattered throughout the galaxy. Weyland-Yutani space-stations, prison planets, lonely traderships dragging their load through space, vast iron foundries... Wherever you end up though, what can be guaranteed is that at some point you'll get facehugged, and you'll be in a desperate chase for medical intervention while you munch your way through all your rations.

BEYOND AREA 51...

BLACKSITE

Harvey 'Deus Ex' Smith explains to *Will Porter* how he's creating an alien force that's a little too close to home...

DEVELOPER Midway PUBLISHER Midway WEBSITE www.blacksitegame.com PREVIOUSLY IN... N/A



He wanted a hot beverage.
He's not a happy chap.



You've seen aliens
before – but on stilts?

SO YOU'RE CHARGED with creating a violent force of interstellar origin for a pseudo follow-up to the relatively dismal *Area 51* in what, hopefully, should be a more refined outing in alien flouting. What's your first step, Harvey 'Deus Ex' Smith?

"We initially looked at all these images of jellyfish, worms, plankton, parasites, all that really disgusting-looking stuff we carry around in our bodies all the time..." explains *BlackSite*'s cheery creative director. "One of our creatures, the drudge, came from those urban-myth photos from Iraq with the soldiers holding up giant camel spiders. We were looking at the skin of the camel spider and the things were disgusting, so we moved in that direction."

I GOT SOUL...

The heart of *BlackSite* may be in its standard squad combat, grenade chucks and fixed perspective helicopter side-gunning at giant 'Tremors' beasts. However, Smith wants its soul a little more mature and edgy. Much like in the forthcoming *Haze*, he's aiming for popcorn gaming with a thought-provoking twist.

The action begins just outside Tikrit in Iraq, where illegally traded alien parts have been buried out of sight and out of mind in a forgotten bunker. Ever

on alert for weapons of mass destruction, meanwhile, you and your fellow Yanks are sent on in. Unfortunately, in this case, the WMDs exist here as well as back home in Area 51: and the accidental and non-accidental establishment of extra-terrestrial genes in flora, fauna and military forces are a-go-go.

"Half of your enemies are part of an insurgency called 'The Reborn', which were created by the US military, so the subversive angle is that you have US soldiers fighting US soldiers," explains Smith passionately, eager for us to understand how he's trying to engineer an alien foe that's as politically close to home as it is of thoroughly distant origin. "Some of those, they start with a human soldier... And they do something to them. There's this tall one that, when it dies, splits apart and has its torso crawl towards you and then becomes a suicide bomb."

WHERE IT'S AT

Whether Smith's clear talent and enthusiasm for melding a hard-nosed sci-fi edge on current world affairs will work in what's clearly otherwise a shooter of the 'no brains' variety is yet to be seen. As, indeed, is whether its entirely traditional formula will cut the mustard on PC. What's easily apparent though is the sheer amount of thought that's gone into it.

"I have a weird opinion," continues Smith. "It's about these soldier guys, and it's that I think what we're dealing with here is a modern bogeyman. Like those modern monsters from *Children Of Men*: the soldiers with the riot gear. It's like a modern icon or something: an archetype. I think the reason it keeps coming up in games is because people want it, they're afraid of it. You're afraid of the cop who can step on your neck and drag you away to some black site and do whatever they want."

Will *BlackSite*'s lofty ambitions be matched by a lofty quality in gameplay though? Here's hoping... **PCZ**

UNATCO operatives: in space!

Smith opens up on JC Denton's failed moon landing...

So this isn't Harvey Smith's first dalliance with the area in and around Area 51 is it? After all, it provided quite an integral part of the original *Deus Ex*.

"I didn't want to put Area 51 in *Deus Ex*!" cries its illustrious lead designer. "I didn't find it that interesting. In fact, initially it was a moonbase. You were going to use the rocket to get to the international space-station (which in our fiction was just sagging and falling apart and barely held together), and from there you were going to use a shuttle to get to a luxury space-station which was going to be like the Titanic. From there, you were going to go to the moonbase, where the game was going to end."

And so it was, then, when the decision was made to cut the space-stations, the moonbase

where a climactic AI originally dwelt similarly bit the dust, even if the tunnels beneath it would later be re-realised as the winding corridors beneath Area 51.


"It was totally crazy – we finally realised this was an Earth-bound game. *Deus Ex* was all about moving through an alley and going up a fire escape, then running on the roof so you can get into somebody's apartment..."

But what of the revelation that a third *Deus Ex* game is newly in the works in the new Eidos offices in Montreal?

Smith whispers: "I'm not allowed to comment!" while a flash of enthusiasm in his eyes reveals that it's something he knows plenty about. Perhaps we can dare to dream of a triumphant Denton return after all...




JC Denton: stargazer.




"When it dies, it splits apart and its torso crawls towards you and then becomes a suicide bomb"


Harvey Smith, creative director, *BlackSite*



The helicopter ride to take out this chap is really rather fun.



Drudge aliens: apparently related to camel spiders.



Your squad are so tough they don't even carry umbrellas.

HOLLYWOOD CALLING...

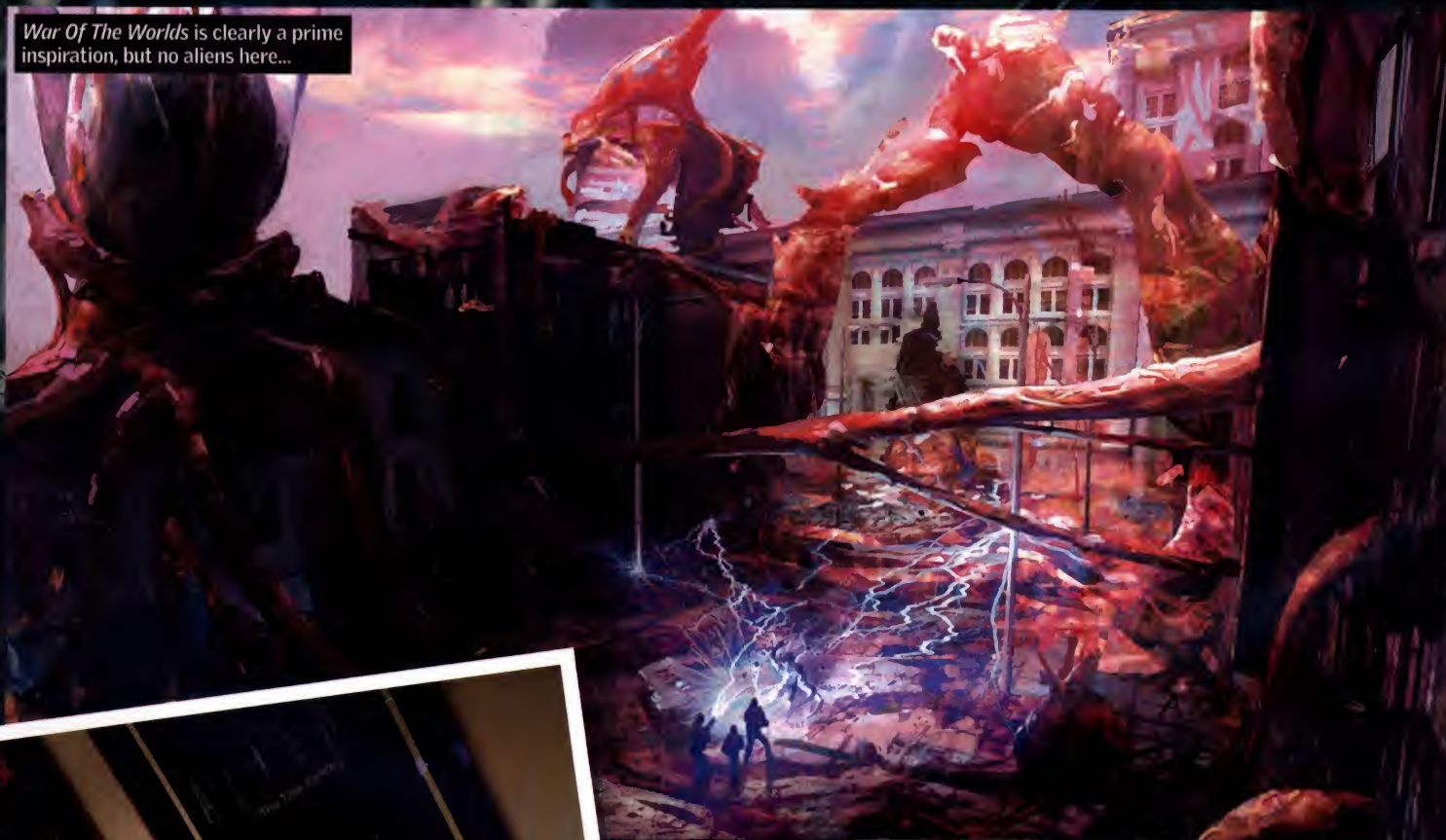
**ETA
2009**

EARTH NO MORE

Exclusive! *Will Porter* talks to the clued-up sci-fi fans quietly plotting a cinematic FPS revolution with *Earth No More*

DEVELOPER Recoil Games PUBLISHER 3D Realms WEBSITE www.3drealms.com

War Of The Worlds is clearly a prime inspiration, but no aliens here...



IT'S A FAMILIAR, nay, almost hackneyed argument that games are becoming more like films. It's a throwaway statement that I myself constantly use when justifying both my job and my favoured pastime to the various outdoor-loving country folk who make up my extended family. In terms of ever-increasing Hollywood bombast, skyrocketing budgets and revenues, this is perhaps true; but the sad fact remains that in many ways, games still have an awful lot of growing up to do.

Bid welcome, then, to *Earth No More* – a game that's an awful long way away (we're talking 2009 here, people), but has a pedigree and a mission statement that make it damn hard to ignore. From a development house splintered from Remedy (the house that *Max Payne* built)

and 3D Realms, it's all part of a concept known as the 'cinename'.

"Our ultimate goal is to bring games to the same level as film and television in terms of providing an interactive experience with emotional consequence," says Samuli Syvähuoko, studio director at Recoil Games. "We want to tap into the whole gamut of human emotions, not just the low-hanging fruit like tension, excitement and fear. The single driving force behind all good films, for example, is drama. And to create meaningful drama, we've got to abandon the lone hero in favour of an ensemble cast. It's this cast of characters that allows us to explore a fuller range of dynamics and conflicts that we've not seen in many previous games."

The briefest of looks around Recoil's Finnish HQ, meanwhile, shows where





Our heroes: mismatched and somewhat gloomy.

the developer's heart lies – *Terminator* posters rub shoulders with those for *War Of The Worlds*, stills of Ripley and Hicks from *Aliens* bedeck designers' boards and innumerable figurines simulate an ongoing toytown war on countless desks. These guys seem to know what holds a good sci-fi yarn together.

WHEN PLANTS ATTACK

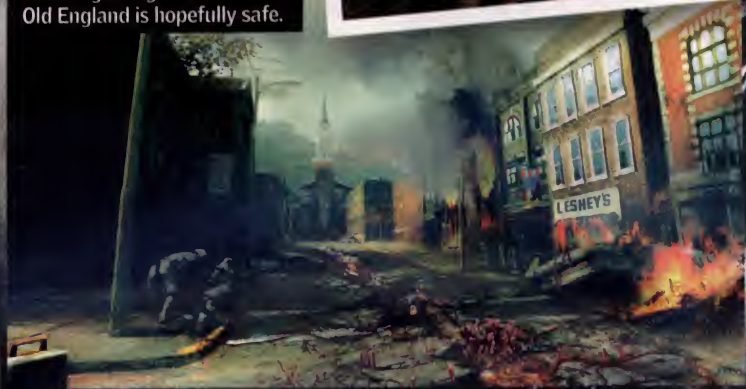
Earth No More doesn't deal with a silly alien invasion or pan-dimensional beings taking a sudden interest in world affairs; it's very much the tale of a home-grown disaster and its effects on both planet Earth and a ragtag bunch of competing personalities you find yourself tied up to. Your name is William Forsyth, and you find yourself trapped in a small New England town shortly after a quarantine has been declared – due to a strange

proliferation of *War Of The Worlds*-esque red vines. From here on in it's an adventure in first-person shooting through a cross-section of locations in the eastern US, as the mystery of exactly what's going on, where the conspiracy lies and which of your squad members could well be complicit unravels. Well, I say squad members – but unfortunately that raises hackles.

"We prefer to think of them as fellow cast members, as opposed to 'squad members,'" explains Raphael van Lierop, the creative director at 3D Realms, as he discusses the game's 'three man, two lady' survival outfit. "This might seem like arguing semantics, but to us it's the difference between having faceless cannon-fodder allies and actual living, breathing characters who play an important role in the larger



New England gets struck first. Old England is hopefully safe.



Remember Kyoto...

Yes it's a game. Yes, it's a bit political

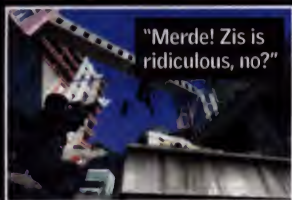
As we've already mentioned at the beginning of this sci-fi spectacular (see page 33), science fiction often extrapolates what's happening today into a terrifying vision of tomorrow. Thereby simultaneously informing us and entertaining us with monsters to kill. It's an ideology clearly shared by the chaps at Recoil. "Entertainment is often the best way to communicate messages of a deeper and more serious meaning. Books, movies and music have been doing this for ages. We felt that it's high time for games to do the same – to really take a stand about something that's both very serious and painfully current," explains Samuli Syväluoto. "In *Earth No More*, we'll witness the consequences of humankind's ongoing assault of the planet's environment. In essence, that's the game's central theme. So, an important part of the storyline deals with global warming, pollution and resource abuse, and the ramifications that are being caused by the climate crisis. But make no mistake: this isn't the game version of *An Inconvenient Truth*! But we like that the game is rooted in modern realities rather than another alien attack. I think we've all been there, done that already."



"Goddammit! Somebody call a gardener!"

Real flesh for the grinder

Human players to occupy the minds of your enemies



Much as in Arkane's forthcoming Parisian weird 'em up *The Crossing*, some of *Earth No More's* supporting cast of enemies will be controlled by other players jumping in and entering your game. "We wanted the enemies in the game to feel really devious to the player, and felt that it would add an element of surprise and tension, not knowing for sure if enemies you encounter in the game were controlled by AI or by human players," smiles Raphael van Lierop. Who knows - if they manage to pull it off you may never be able to blame bad AI again; you could just be dealing with a real person who's incredibly cack-handed at games. Whoever encounters PC ZONE editor Jamie Sefton could potentially finish the game in a matter of minutes - so Recoil had better get some safeguards in.

storyline and who the player actually cares about. We're pioneering a new style of game which moves away from the 'lone hero'-type scenario and instead thrusts the player into a situation where they can experience real drama. Real drama emerges from an interaction between believable characters with compelling stories of their own, within a charged setting and narrative context. So, no more cookie-cutter NPCs who are essentially cannon fodder, running around a paper-thin plot."

COMMON PEOPLE

Each character (who your mates will be able to control in co-op, incidentally) will come with his or her own backstory, moral beliefs, secrets and personality. And the level to which you'll be able to converse with them, almost rivalling the sort of conversations you'd expect in a BioWare game, is frighteningly deep for an action-shooter. "Ultimately, they're just normal people," says Syvähuoko. "They're not superheroes. They're just normal people who are trying to make the best of a very bad situation, trying to survive, trying to reconcile with their families, trying to overcome tragedy and personal loss, trying to make sense of it all. And sometimes those ordinary people will be required to do extraordinary things to survive, and they will be changed by it. Hopefully, our players will be changed by it as well."

A lofty goal. And one, surely, that has a cynical Brit's bullshit detector wired for sound. Both you and I have heard this



'loveable virtual friends' claim many times before – but rein in the knee-jerk reaction a little and you realise that the Recoil and 3D Realms boys are talking sense. The initial template they're using is that of the sci-fi disaster movie – stuff like *The Thing* or *Alien*. Ultimately, what makes these films great isn't a chest-burst scene or a bit where a human body cavity bites off a man's arms before its head grows legs and runs away (though that certainly helps). Rather, it's the tension and realism provided by an unsettled cohesion of flawed characters, and the way in which you relate to them.

"The tension created by putting a group of strong, often incompatible characters into a high-stress scenario also allows us to explore all kinds of interesting story directions, as well as to contextualise all the action in the game," explains Van Lierop. "Action doesn't just occur in a vacuum – things happen because people make difficult, often flawed decisions about how they are going to react to a stimulus in their environment. This sounds obvious, and yet how often have you stopped playing a game because you had no idea why you were in room X fighting enemy Y? We never want players to have that feeling in *Earth No More*."

SHOCK AND OAR

So, so far we've got ourselves a shooter trying on certain swish garments from the cinematic metaphorical clothes rack at Topman, but there's a certain area in which games clearly have an upper hand over our old friend celluloid. Namely, that you're one of the stars of the show –

and thereby get to stick an oar into proceedings. Even if it's an oar that might come back to haunt you, or an oar that's somewhat morally demanding. Either way – in games you get an oar, and in films you don't.

"*Earth No More* will allow the player to react to the ever-evolving gameplay situation as he or she sees fit. Oftentimes, the player will be faced with situations that will include several layers of potential consequences and moral dilemma," explains Syvähuoko. "Each decision that the player makes will have an impact on the way the other characters view him. They will remember each situation and form a cumulative opinion about the player – sometimes resulting in drastic consequences, and sometimes something completely the opposite."

ROLE AND SHOOT

So, essentially we're thinking of a shooter donning the karmic mantle of an RPG – something at once obvious, yet simultaneously far, far away from what we have in the current crop of shooters. Imagine a *Half-Life 2* in which Alyx grew to resent you repeatedly staring at her arse and eventually became miffed at your insistence on piling street furniture on dead bodies. Or, to be slightly less jocular, one in which she reacts with horror as you decide you don't want to rescue City 17 survivors after all, and would rather keep yourself safe. *Deus Ex* trod on the toes of this concept, with Alex Jacobson's expression of horror as you (for example) chose to gas an underground system where civilians were being held hostage, but beyond

this, true NPC approval or suspicion has never really entered into action games. In shooters, by and large, only bad guys diss the hero.

NO 'I' IN TEAM

As for the action itself, well, that's one thing that 3D Realms and Recoil aren't keen to spill the beans on – but it would seem that affairs will be a lot more like a collaborative *Half-Life 2* effort rather than a tactically skewed *Rainbow Six*-type affair. Just as character personalities are being built to bounce off each other, the game is set to feel like a joint effort, with each weapon being designed with collaborative use in mind – and one weapon called the Linker that 3D Realms's boss describes as being "a reverse proton pack from *Ghostbusters*".

In addition to all of this, expect some issues with a military having enormous problems with crowd control, long alien (yet not extraterrestrial) spines jamming themselves into the sides of modern America and all the visual jazz that Unreal Engine 3 can muster for a game that's two years off in the ether. Yes, it is a long, long way from completion – but talking to a group of developers who are clearly not content to merely sit inside a genre and trot out the same old shooter routine with bigger and better explosions is genuinely refreshing. It'll be in hibernation for quite a while after you read this, but do keep an eye out for *Earth No More* – it really could be quite special... **PCT**



Recoil's studio director Samuli Syvähuoko.



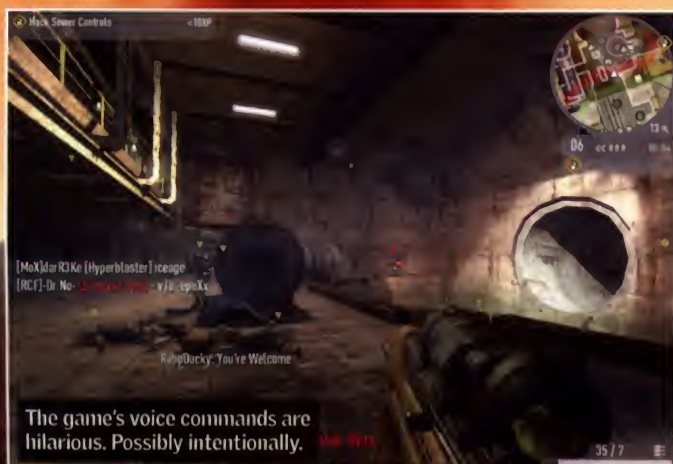
THE FLOODGATES OPEN...

ENEMY TERRITORY: QUAKE WARS



Now the Beta's done the rounds, the opinions of the internet floweth over. *Steve Hogarty* gauges the great unwashed reaction...

DEVELOPER Splash Damage/Id Software PUBLISHER Activision
WEBSITE www.enemyterritory.com PREVIOUSLY IN... 176



SPLASH DAMAGE'S STRATEGIC online shooter recently dipped a toe into the frosty pool of public testing, generating not only massive amounts of enjoyment for gamers who were quick enough to grab one of 60,000 Beta keys, but also a fair amount of publicity for the futuristic shooter. If you've not played the *Enemy Territory: Quake Wars* Beta, then this is what you've missed. Boo hoo.

A single map, Sewer, in which the Global Defence Force (us, the good guys) are attempting to infiltrate some Strogg-controlled aqueducts in order to flood them. This is achieved through the GDF sequentially deploying, destroying and hacking objectives as the invading Strogg (aliens, bad guys) attempt to fend them off with alien technology until the round ends. Of course, that's all a thin nothingness draped over the real matter at hand – what did the collective internet make of Splash Damage's online shooter?

Of course, they were naturally cynical. Some might even say they were caustic and unforgiving, relentlessly emptying their hate sacks on any message board that would have them. *Enemy Territory: Quake Wars* is an excellent online shooter, and it takes only a modicum of exposure to the thing to realise this, but all criticisms, however exaggerated, are presumably built around some genuine problem with the game. With that in mind, let us consider some of the outrageous opinions of the internet...



World Wide Warblings

"This map sucks, suckity-suck, suck-aroo. Suck!"
The internet

We've got to wonder why Splash Damage chose Sewer over some of the other maps they've showcased previously. The map provided in the Beta is artistically lacking, with big chunks of the playable area going unused. It's also far more fun to play as the GDF on Sewer, as they're the attacking force and have more to do. Ark would've been a far more impressive introduction to *Quake Wars*, providing not only prettier views, but more vehicles too. So yeah, Sewer isn't brilliant, but it doesn't suck. There's no suction here at all.

"The vehicles are too slow, this plane is broken. ARGH, I CRASHED."
The internet

The ground vehicles do lack some oomph, but some have 'sprint' modes to offset that. Oomph problems aside though, the Strogg Tormentor flies perfectly well. All of the game's animations have been capped at 30fps, so that makes some vehicles appear slightly choppy at points, but the full game will feature far smoother animations, and so, smoother flights. The GDF air force doesn't appear in the Beta either, but their Bumblebee is the most sluggish thing in the air (in a way that feels natural and good), while the Anansi is amazing fun to pilot.



The Strogg Tormentor gunship is useless in the hands of a rookie – ie, me.



Busybody engineers can build this tower as a side-mission.



Corpses can become Strogg spawn hosts – icky!

The internet loves to whine, but 60,000 gamers have still kept on playing, regardless

So are the criticisms of *Quake Wars* valid? One thing's for sure: if you build a forum, they will come. And invariably moan...

"This looks like my dog vomited on my screen – I want my money back." *The internet*

Unless you've got some kind of wonder-dog, I think you're mistaken. Granted, on the highest settings the game doesn't seem to match up with the movies and screenshots released earlier, but this *is* the Beta. We've heard from one source that the prettiest visuals have been left out to keep the file size down (it's download only), but we've heard from another that what we're seeing now is what it'll look like on release. But really, does it look so bad? It runs at a fair old pace, and we took these screenshots on a 640MB 8800GTS if you want to play detective.

"Everybody is idiots." *The internet*

Yes, this will happen when thousands upon thousands of people play the game for the very first time. Nobody's playing medic, covert ops aren't dropping their radar and field ops aren't dropping ammo. Also, at the time of writing, the server browser can't put you in matches with clan-mates. If you've played *Wolfenstein: Enemy Territory*, you'll have some experience here, and when all around you are losing their heads, it'll probably piss you off. The final game will have much improved server options, so you'll never have to play with dreaded pubbies and newbs for as long as you live.

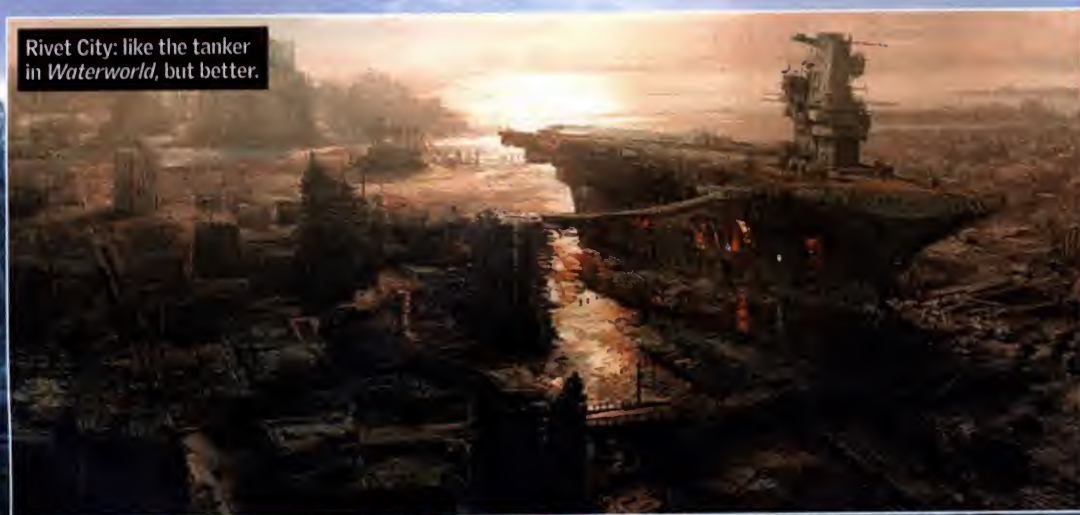
"Well maybe we should just wait and see." *PC ZONE*

Of course, for every negative post there are many more softly spoken positives. *Quake Wars* will be undeniably fun – the classes feel refreshingly distinct, their abilities are actually interesting, you can call in orbital laser strikes and aerial bombardments and you can spawn out of a dead man's corpse. That's a level of class you just don't come across enough in games. Plus, the internet loves to whine, that's a given, but when 60,000 gamers keep on playing, regardless of these supposedly game-destroying issues (pah!), you know Splash Damage are doing something right. Something really big, and really right.

COMING **SCI-FI SPECIAL** ATTRACTIONS

Will Porter weighs up three blockbusters likely to change your world for the better

Rivet City: like the tanker in *Waterworld*, but better.



FALLOUT 3

fallout.bethsoft.com | ETA: Q3 2008

BETHESDA APPEAR TO have nailed it. Even the part of this game before you come to the surface, with its wrecked Eastern seaboard, sounds like a slice of RPG genius. Said seaboard includes a wrecked Washington DC, a place called Rivet City built inside the rotting hulk of an aircraft carrier and smaller places primed for non-existence, such as the town of Megaton with its worshipped, unexploded nuclear bomb.

To intensify the claustrophobic feeling within Vault 101, where your people have lived in confinement since the bombs began, the game begins at your birth, then fades in and out of your childhood. What's more, every time you'll be subtly nudged into making vital decisions usually played

out on a character-creation screen, and learning the way the game works.

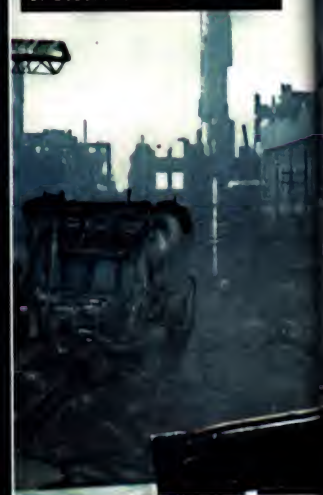
At birth, your father (played by Liam Neeson) will analyse your DNA and you'll choose stuff like gender and ethnicity; on your 16th birthday, you'll take your G.O.A.T. tests to determine personal skills and traits. It all leads up to the age of 19, when dad mysteriously disappears, the fabled rolling door is opened and you emerge clad in a familiar blue boiler suit under the glare of an unfamiliar sun.

The game is causing the expected grumbling in the *Fallout* community, but for my part, I certainly didn't expect so many of the hallmarks of *Fallout*'s gameplay to be returning. The SPECIAL system remains with its perks and traits. The gore remains. A robust 'karma' morality system remains. The PipBoy remains, now in its 3000 model, with

familiar quest and record-management duties. Most interestingly, though, the action points formerly found in *Fallout*'s turn-based combat remain – now twisted and used in combat that's halfway between stop-start shootage and real-time. You can blast away from your FPS or over-the-shoulder viewpoint, but also freeze the skirmish and spend your action points by choosing different body parts to fire at – each with a certain percentage chance of success. It's still *Fallout*, but a *Fallout* adapted to better suit our tastes and times.

We're meeting up with Bethesda next issue to ask whether adult themes of sex and drugs, dogs called Dogmeat and a parade of glorious brown will also be making a return. In the meantime, the bomb has dropped, and I'm sat atop it hollering with joy. **PCZ**

Yes, kids – the Brotherhood of Steel are back!



The Green Cross code has become largely redundant.

CRYSIS

www.crysis.ea.com | ETA: Q3



Korean men can't jump...

CRYSIS MAY APPEAR to be the spiritual successor to *Far Cry*, but it's not. Can you imagine Jack Carver running up to a mercenary, grabbing him by the throat, squeezing it so his eyes bulge and then throwing him into a tree? Possibly not.

My first play of Crytek's latest started off in true Micronesian style – tagging enemies, sneaking around the vegetation surrounding a valley-bound Korean base and readying my easily silenced weapon. However, when everything went tits-up, a new sandbox element of unscripted chaos emerged. Charging my suit with speed, leaping over and onto roofs, thumping jeeps and watching them cartwheel onto nearby enemies... It was pure and joyous fun – ending only when I jumped down from a building onto a cowering Asian chap with my power-punch arm pulled back. His trigger finger was faster than my descent, and back to quickload I did go.

Lasting slightly longer this time, I survived until a helicopter showed up, intent on curtailing my new hobby of lobbing its dead allies into walls, corrugated iron and tree trunks. It was here that I discovered that *Crysis* may well be the first game to allow you to fight helicopter gunships with a washing basket, or at least something that looks like one. It didn't do much damage (and neither did the boxes, tyres and other household items found then flung), but it filled in the time before the discovery of a rocket launcher. Honestly, as soon as you find out the day that *Crysis* is coming out, book some time off work. It's going to be a total riot.

STAR TREK: ONLINE

www.startrekonline.com | ETA: 2008

THE FRANCHISE MAY be (ahem) a logical choice for the massively multiplayer treatment, yet the makers of *Star Trek: Online* have so far avoided the interminable hype machine – perhaps aware of how bluff and bluster can only end in disappointment (he said, looking at *Star Wars: Galaxies*). Still, the fabric for a fulfilling Starfleet jaunt is certainly here: nine playable races, all manner of starships and stations, crew-based ship-on-ship combat and many, many planets for you to beam down onto for tricordering and Prime Directive-ignoring.

Kicking off in a time of relative peace 25 years after the dullness of *Star Trek: Nemesis*, the game looks set to feature all the expected villains, plus a brand-new enemy from the Beta Quadrant. Can a new challenger emerge in the wake of *Star Trek: Legacy*? Perpetual Entertainment aren't making a fuss just yet – but they certainly exude an aura of quiet confidence.



The final frontier just got final-er.

ETA
OCTOBER

GOOD WILL HUNTERS...

HALF-LIFE 2: EPISODE TWO

Steve Hogarty lugs his anti-gravity weaponry outdoors...

DEVELOPER Valve
PUBLISHER Valve/EA
WEBSITE <http://hl2.half-life2.com>
PREVIOUSLY IN... 173



See? Not so big when they're out in the open.

WHAT WE WOULDN'T give to have *Episode 2* begin with a grunting 'previously in *Half-Life*' intro, before diving headfirst into an audio-visual montage of exposition. We sort of need it now that Valve have left *Episode 2* waiting on the sidelines for this long, otherwise we might resort to writing 'Eli Vance = Black' on a post-it note just to recall who's who.

If such a montage did exist, it would include the following: Alyx stealing an important plot-related data packet from the Combine. Mossman's panicked Arctic-base message. Kleiner's urging you to flee City 17, and your final trip aboard the northbound train out of said city, calling at an Eastern European-style countryside and fields full of unhappy Striders and Hunters.

Episode Two marks the *Half-Life* series' departure into the great outdoors. It also marks the point at which the thoroughly downtrodden human race has begun to revel in its post-apocalyptic squalor: Ladies and gents, the rebels have built the most

stylish mode of transportation this side of *Mad Max* – the retro-fitted muscle car. Oh yeah, the Combine *wish* they could assimilate something this cool. The motor will feature throughout a vast swathe of the episode, allowing NPCs to tag along with Gordon on his madcap adventure.

SOUND OF SILENCE

For the particular section of the game I played, it was Alyx parked in the passenger seat. She grunts when driven too fast around a corner, but remains eerily mute when deliberately ploughed into a stream, and then into a rock. You'd lose a whole 10hp, while she remains annoyingly unfazed. Aside from frequent attempts to kill your lovely sidekick, *Episode Two* offers pleasingly large chunks of terrain in which to careen, allowing a certain degree of freedom but eventually funnelling you towards your objective – in this case, a radio tower atop some high ground.

Once there (it's not a difficult drive), Alyx exits and tries successfully to be as

Speaking of retro-fitting, the Source engine has grown some new graphical features.



THE LOWDOWN

- Next chapter in the greatest shooter series ever ✓
- Hugely improved Source engine ✓
- Will be the 'meat' of the trilogy, claim Valve ✓
- Hunters are the best enemies the series has spawned ✓
- Bundled with *Team Fortress 2* and *Portal* ✓

THE STORY SO FAR...

VALVE

Half-Life
It's almost been a decade since this revolutionary title landed.



1998

Half-Life 2
And almost been four years since this one landed. I know, doesn't time just fly?

2004

Half-Life 2: Episode One
It's almost been a year and a half since this one too.

2006



Half-Life 2: Episode Two
Speaking relatively, the gap between episodes isn't so big.

2007

Oh G-Man, what have you seen now?



This chapter takes you into the antlion's underground colony.



discreet and unimposing as possible. *Episode Two* carries on its forerunner's tradition of providing you with companions that stay out of your way and require no real guidance, while still being useful in an *R-Type* satellite gun-pod kind of way. The lady piped up only to say that power must be restored to the radio tower, thanks to the Combine's energy-conscious habit of switching everything off before they leave.

One *Crystal Maze*-inspired puzzle later, and with the electricity now flowing, I encountered a Hunter for the first time. Now up until this point, I believed Hunters to be terrifying bio-mechanical tri-pedal predators, stopping at nothing to destroy you and your trendy vehicle, possibly before teabagging your corpse as the screen faded to red. Neither tree nor wall nor retro-fitted muscle car would stand in their slender-legged way.

ROLL OVER

Well, that's mostly accurate actually (though your car will plough right through the buggers), except they're not as evil as they look. They're puppies. Big, friendly-eyed Labradors. The first glimpse of one as it peered through a window had Alyx urging me to hide, but that Hunter really looked like a dog who wanted to be where you were, but couldn't quite get there so instead decided to gaze at you longingly. It looked sad. Poor Hunter.

Pretty soon after this, the Hunter was firing its sticky, explosive ordnance at me. Glowing blue darts fire in sets of threes, sticking to the surfaces around my hiding spot and exploding shortly thereafter. This sort of weapon forces you to keep moving – and the Hunter takes some beating before it finally swoons.

This is still *Half-Life 2*, but it's a slightly different sport now. It presents old enemies in a new light and forces

Alyx remains mute when ploughed into a stream, and then after, into a rock

you to deal with them using new techniques. Whether you're interested or not doesn't really matter either, as on release it will be helplessly sellotaped to the ineffably fantastic *Team Fortress 2*, along with *Portal*. And that's good news for Valve, as you could venture the opinion that with tapering interest in all things *Half-Life 2*, many people wouldn't grab this were it not sharing a box with something everybody will want to play. You'd swear Valve had planned it that way, the swines. **PC**

Slightly reminiscent of Black Mesa's reception...



He's only got eyes for you.

**SCI-FI
SPECIAL**

1

**HOT
SHOTS**

TABULA RASA

DEVELOPER NCsoft Austin PUBLISHER NCsoft WEB www.playtr.com/ ETA Q4

HUMANS ARE SCATTERED through the cosmos. The invasion of the Bane coincided with our discovery of an ancient race's wormhole technology, which meant pockets of Earth's inhabitants could escape an otherwise grisly fate.

Now starting from a 'tabula rasa', or clean slate, the war against alien foes carries on in a style that's both massive and multiplayer, but with a few ounces of shooting piled in alongside the dice-rolls.

Essentially the game where *PlanetSide* and *Guild Wars* collide, it's something that's tumbled from the big brain of Richard Garriott – who not only created the seminal *Ultima Online*, but was also on the same zero-g 'vomit comet' flight as Professor Stephen Hawking. Which is excellent trivia.

2



The Bigger Picture

1 FR'INSTANCE

The main body of *Tabula Rasa* sees you fighting alongside the NPC Allied Free Sentients, winning and losing control points on various battlegrounds. Heavily scripted instances like this one, meanwhile, bulk up co-op action.

2 BARK PORTAL

Hmm, this is a mite familiar. The first *TR* release will see two planets primed for exploration and battle. Further landmasses will be added through downloaded updates and expansions.

3 AND THAT'S (NOT) MAGIC!

Droopy sleeves and conical hats have little sway in outer space, so here, a nice space lady is learning a Logos symbol from an Elohim shrine. Learning the symbols for 'Power' and 'Time', for example, allows you to perform 'Drain'.

4 TOUCH OF CLASS

You don't choose a class straight off, instead opportunities appear over time. If you decide you're not a fan of a chosen role, meanwhile, you can save your character before each big decision and jump back to the way you were...

5 COVERING FIRE

It's still very much a dice-rolling game, but as you, your friends and AI cohorts leg it over *Tabula Rasa*'s many battlefields, real-time fight considerations have to be made. Taking cover, for example, reduces the damage you take.

6 GRIND-FREE?

This chap may look moody, but he's happy inside. The way *TR* has been designed means that you can not only fight alongside more powerful buddies, but also kill things more powerful than yourself.

7 ALT ATTACK

And here's one of the Bane up close and fairly personal. Usually you'll be zapping them from a distance with pistols, shotguns and rifles – but if you fancy something a bit more manly, you can jab their faces with your weapon, *Halo*-style.

3



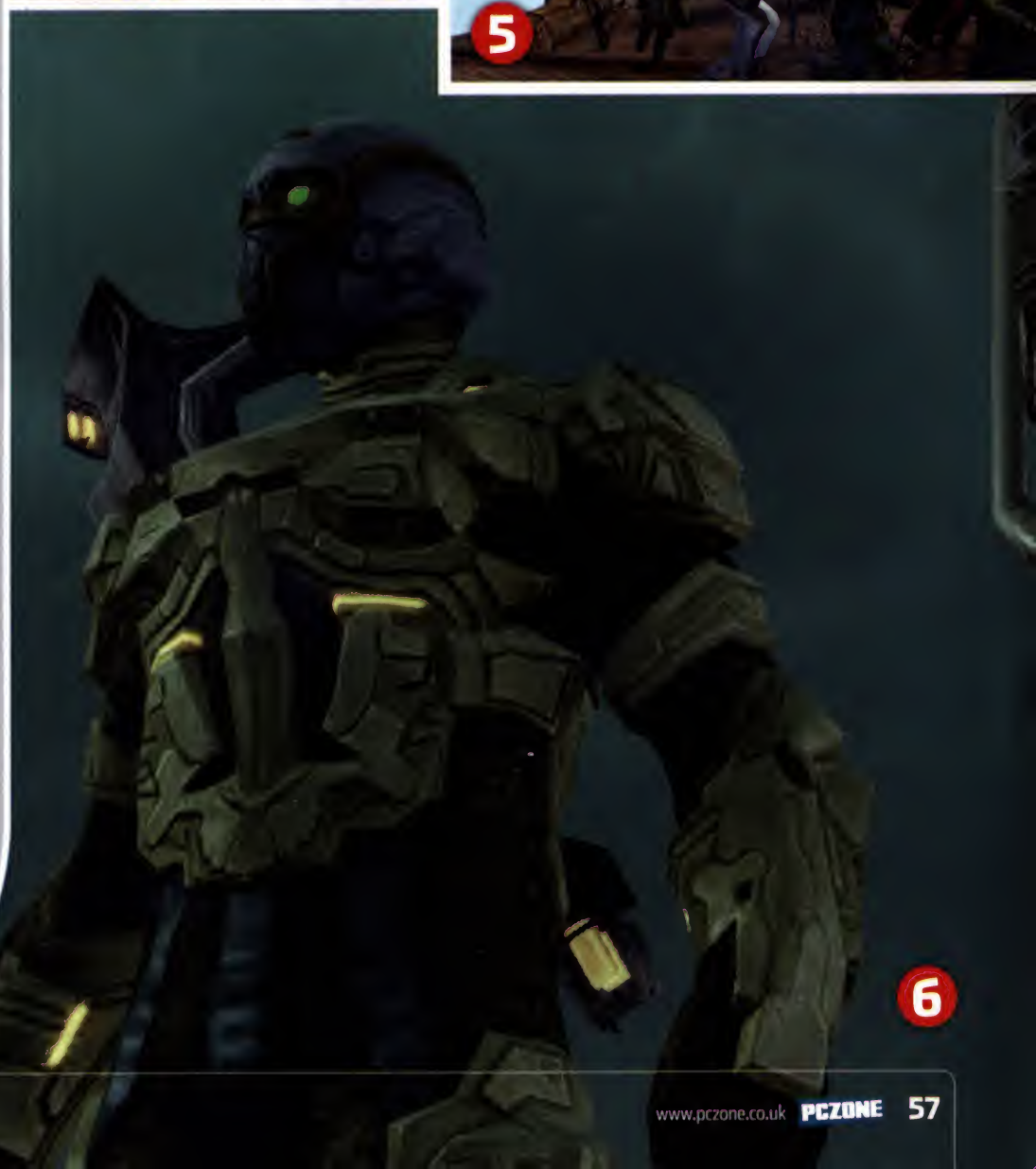
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5



6



**SCI-FI
SPECIAL****THE LOWDOWN**

- Prequel to the year's best solo shooter experience ✓
- AI-driven all-out war between stalker factions ✓
- Darker, more brooding exclusion zone ✓
- Updated engine and animations ✓
- GSC aren't the best timekeepers ✗

BEFORE THE DARK TIMES...**STALKER
CLEAR SKY – PROLOGUE**

Will Porter discovers an older, more refined Chernobyl. Where everyone was more polite and you could leave your door unlocked. Well, almost...

DEVELOPER GSC Game World PUBLISHER TBA WEBSITE www.gsc-game.com

AFTER A GESTATION period that could only be rivalled by the collective efforts of 15 pregnant elephants, GSC Game World's *STALKER* eventually became the most atmospheric and original shooter to feature in these pages in recent years. A lovable rogue of a game with a fair few rough edges in presentation that belied some razor-sharp gunplay and genuinely unsettling wanderings through the wilderness. And now, the Zone wants us back.

Clear Sky kicks off a year before *Shadow Of Chernobyl*'s amnesiac lead character, one Strelak, began chasing his own tail through the wastes. Indeed,

the game builds up to explaining where he comes from and why exactly it is that the many and various fates of the Exclusion Zone rest on his gruff Ukrainian shoulders. In fact, now, playing as a stalker mercenary of a rival faction, you're out to kill him.

The theatrics of vanilla *STALKER* were actually the forgetful Strelak's third visit to the CNPP at its hub, you see – the first of these visits unbalanced its fragile state and caused frequent blowouts to ravage the wastes. "Each of these blowouts scorches this new protagonist's nerve system more," explains project lead Anton Bolshakov. "There's no way out – in order to survive you'll have to find and stop Strelak."

And so begins an unstoppable bullet-ridden journey that may well leave our former buddy lying brain-bumped in a soon-to-be-electrified death truck at *Shadow Of Chernobyl*'s start.

THE BAD OLD DAYS

Just because it's a prequel, though, don't expect everything to kick off all shiny and happy, with a moment where a seven-year-old child accidentally destroys a military starship. It turns out that *Shadow Of Chernobyl* was a time of relative peace and normality in the Zone, and that one year earlier, Strelak's first walking tours through Soviet nuclear history had everything royally screwed. "The Zone is agitated... Energy seething..." intones Bolshakov solemnly. "The anomalies are extremely active and the landscape is vastly different to what you've seen before. Instead of

ETA
**Q2
2008**

THE STORY SO FAR...

STALKER

In the beginning...
Former incarnation *Oblivion Lost* is announced. Thumb-twiddling begins.

2001

Development hell
Original release date is spectacularly missed. Thumb-twiddling intensifies somewhat.

2003



The rapture!
STALKER finally sees daylight. Thumb-twiddling pleasurably brought to a halt.

2007



The second coming
STALKER: Clear Sky scheduled for release. More thumb-twiddling widely anticipated.

2008

"So, guys, you want to try that new Chinese place after this?"



Once a hospital that healed. Now a ruin that maims.



the serene-looking way it looked before – green grass, trees, ruins of buildings and so forth – there will be simply horrifying anomalous phenomena. The ground distorted outwards or inwards by concentrated pockets of gravity, greenery defaced by strokes of what we call 'electra'. Even the air isn't as pure as in the original *STALKER* – with these 'spatial bubbles' which are like confusing Möbius rings that whole expeditions of Stalkers simply can't find a way out of."

PICNIC, ANYONE?

Imagine, if you will, that the Chernobyl exclusion zone is a very big pie with the power plant at its centre. It's not a particularly nice pie – the folks at Fray Bentos shouldn't be unduly concerned – but the original game covers what's

essentially a southerly slice of it. The prequel, meanwhile, gives you an extra slice of this metaphorical pie at the same time as covering some noteworthy changes within what we've played through already – to the extent that the game is 50% completely new areas, and 50% twisted renditions of what you've played before. You won't be revisiting the doleful Big Wheel of Pripyat, for example, but you will be scuttling beneath the town through its increasingly manky underground system, while new highways and byways will be opened up into the Red Forest and a lost city known as Limansk (see boxout, above).

Once again, it's all down to the wanderings of Strelak. On one of his pre-amnesia jaunts up to the power plant, the resultant



"Reg! I've found Jimmy Hoffa!"



'Tis a doorway to destruction...



Don't trust a cheery blue sky. There's radiation afoot!



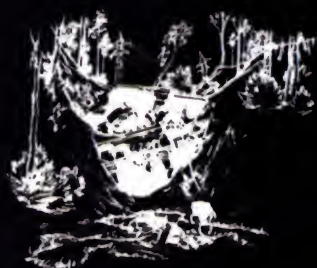
"The landscape is vastly different to what you've seen before – there will be horrifying phenomena"

Anton Bolshakov, GSC Game World

Life in Limansk

Exploring the Zone's lost city

The primary battle in the war between the factions is Duty and Freedom's scuffle over Limansk – a 'safe' gateway to the centre of the Zone. Featuring architecture GSC have modelled from old neighbourhoods in their hometown of Kiev, this small 1950s country town was once thought lost – but now echoes with the sound of gunfire. "As with Pripyat, Limansk was abandoned by its residents," explains Anton Bolshakov. "The houses are covered with wild vines, roofs have lowered and fallen through, trees are growing through shabby walls. Once it was a very cosy town – you'll see abandoned yards, garages, a little park with a mosaic-clad fountain/statue and benches, a playground with a spaceship-shaped slide, a model rooster and a giraffe. It isn't like Pripyat – it doesn't have wide squares and boulevards. Its streets are narrow and curved, with buildings of varying heights standing much closer to each other." A giraffe in *STALKER*. You heard it here first.



nuclear blowout, put simply, redrew the map of the Zone. Anomalies blocked existing paths, new areas suddenly became less toxic to human presence – and the territorial balance between the major groups of stalkers such as Duty and Freedom was thrown completely out of whack.

"In the *STALKER* you've played, it was beneficial for different groupings to coexist rather than live in conflict," explains Bolshakov. "But now, in a blink of an eye, everything's changed, and fights have flared up for new territory. The biggest-scale battle is for the lost city of Limansk – which opens a new path towards the Zone centre."

IT'S A STALK-OFF

At this point things get really rather exciting for armchair Stalkers such as you and I: there's an entirely AI-driven Stalker war for you to participate in. While we may not be talking *Call Of Duty* here (we're looking at scuffles with numbers of perhaps ten against ten), but upgrading the vanilla game's A-Life system to deal with guerrilla warfare is quite ingenious. You can join any of eight factions, each with its own base, leader, guards, bar, mechanic and full complement of characters.

"Smile, you rodent son of a bitch!"



Street crime is an issue, but on the upside, housing is affordable.

From each base, groups of AI-controlled Stalkers will set out on game-generated missions to capture noteworthy points on the map – areas with artefacts and anomalies that could well help the cause, and scientific labs which will open up access to superior weapons and equipment – or simply to rebuff AI-driven counter-attacks. The war will move back and forth, with its climaxes coming thick and fast as you overrun (hopefully) the bases of your rivals in final pushes against the enemy. But don't expect to be part of that force straight away. You'll start labelled as a rookie, with familiar dogsbody jobs like, er, killing packs of dogs before climbing up the ladder to veteran and being asked to perform tasks more intrinsic to winning the war.

"We also want the player to see what their actions lead to," adds Bolshakov. "So, for example, a control point leading to an artefact-rich area might be controlled by the Bandits

faction, and eliminating them means that the way to the resources is safe. So you'll see Stalkers of your grouping setting off towards the artefact spot. Another example is that the more artefact-bearing spots that are won for a certain faction, the more high-rank Stalkers it can recruit."

You won't be forced into joining up with a faction straight from the off – you can potter around as a lone wolf as you did before – but the primary path to the centre of the Zone through the lost city of Limansk will only be accessible once one of the primary groups has been trashed. So your help would probably be appreciated.

With each faction planned to be subtly different from the others in terms of the tactics it employs, and tactical spots changing hands almost in the fashion of a slow-paced *Battlefield*, GSC have also used the opportunity to pack in some impressively built stand-off scenarios. Take the set-piece of the



You can join any of eight factions, each with its own base, leader, guards, mechanic and characters

mangled bridge – with numerous points of cover along either side, a steep gully and the veritable sniping haven of its construction. Now imagine the sheer joy of a multi-character battle playing out over it – each side ducking, hiding, popping out for a quick headshot and attempting to win control. It's trench warfare, but with only one trench. We're definitely in for some fun.

THE FIX LIST

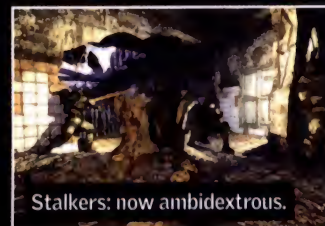
Our Ukrainian friends haven't ignored some of the more glaring issues with vanilla *STALKER* either. The game's dodgy interface is getting a rethink, the PDA is being redesigned to make mission markers a little more obvious and your screen is generally being

All this, and some steel walls to boot! Gasp!



Armoury refit All change for *STALKER*'s weapon system

One of the best things about *STALKER* was its high-end weapons – they were sexy, powerful beasts that made you cackle with glee when firing at your foes. In hindsight, though, the way in which you picked them up was almost too random – you were constantly worried that you weren't quite tooled up enough. So now, alongside six entirely new weapon models, the system has been streamlined. There'll be common weapons that you can pick up from any poor sod you've shot, much as before, but these will hardly be modifiable at all. Find a rarer gun through a sub-mission or by sheer dumb luck, though, and there'll be ten different upgrades to strap onto the thing. You'll also be able to use both your hands now; a pistol in one, for example, and a radiation detector in the other.



Stalkers: now ambidextrous.

At least this underground has decent ventilation.



cleared of unnecessary clutter. "Another notable direction we're working in is to make the behaviour of rank-and-file Stalkers a bit more lively and fun," adds Bolshakov. "Neutral Stalkers will pay more attention to a passing player, and have a chat with him. So you can trade and discuss more topics."

A bunch of new monsters, meanwhile, will crop up in the Pripjat underground system, with a few new roaming beasts on the surface to boot. GSC are also pumping up their menagerie's AI, physics-object manipulation and psychic abilities. As for graphics, well, they're working flat out to provide a DX10 version, but don't want to 100% promise it – as it stands, the engine is enormously tweaked from what we've played before. Oh, and they're thinking of adding vehicles to multiplayer as well. There are tons of tweaks going on.

Aside from interface niggles, my primary problem with the original *STALKER* was simply that I rarely felt

truly engaged with current affairs in the Zone. Both scripted and AI-driven Stalker confrontations would kick off – but there'd rarely be a genuine sense of occasion, nor any ascertainable meaning behind exactly why so many identikit men of similar background and appearance were so angry with each other. Now, though, it feels that a gameplay model has been found to add some drive, a feeling of Stalker brotherhood and – most importantly – keep unnecessary scripting at bay. I'm honestly impressed.

But – and you knew this one was coming – just when do GSC Game World expect *Clear Sky* to tumble off the production line? Frankly, they're not the gaming world's most renowned timekeepers. "*STALKER* was just one big lesson," smiles Bolshakov. "We've mastered it. The prequel's release is set for the first half of next year. There won't be any delays." I've got my fingers crossed – feel free to join in. **PC7**

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REVIEWS

Our verdict on the latest PC games

B-b-b-build

DESPITE RESOLVING SOMETIME ago that I wouldn't submit to another MMO, something looms upon the horizon that may just shatter my long-held values. That something is *LEGO Universe*. Yes, I'm a LEGO addict: I spent most of my childhood fiddling with bricks.

It has the potential to be amazing. Imagine building your own home, brick by brick. Then inviting your mates over to all join together to collectively build stuff online in a LEGO version of *Garry's Mod*. Fancy your own personal helicopter? Then build one. Fancy a phallus-shaped spaceship – and let's face it, who could resist? – well, it's all possible.

Imagine different zones for each of the different types of LEGO. Medieval with its knights, castles, siege equipment and red block-breathing dragons; sci-fi with little spacemen and spaceships; and the modern world, modelled in beautiful brick form. A bit like that *GTA: LEGO City* video. Only minus the prostitutes.

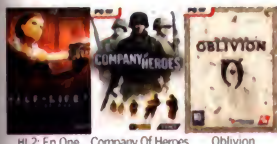
I could go on, but I won't. Because knowing my luck, they'll declare it's a kids' game and that phallus-shaped objects are banned. We can but hope...

Suzy Wallace

Suzy Wallace, reviews editor

Must Buys!

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HL2: Ep One Company Of Heroes Oblivion

66

GHOST RECON: ADVANCED WARFIGHTER 2

A lowly private or a butt-kicking general?
We take a trip to Mexico to find out...

The PC ZONE Awards



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The best games ever. If you're lucky enough to see one, stop and buy it.



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AND THE REST



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The PC ZONE gaming machine

As you'll see on the many pages of resplendent reviews that follow, we list the minimum specifications you need to play each game in each review. Please refer to the publisher's website to check out their recommended optimum specs that'll make the games super-whizzy. We review all new games on a variety of systems, including our top-spec, very desirable Xworks X81-C2D, (pictured right). For more info on Xworks, tap into the wonder that is the Internet and type the following selection of letters into your browser: www.xworksinteractive.com



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AT A GLANCE...

Team-based tactical shooter melding action, stealth and superb multiplayer missions, but blighted by similarities to its predecessor and some poor AI.

Minimum system requirements:
2GHz processor, 1GB RAM, 128MB graphics card with Pixel Shader 2.0.

HOW IT STACKS

SWAT 4 **86%**

GRAV 2 **80%**

RAINBOW SIX:
LOCKDOWN **67%**

THERE ARE SEQUELS and then there are follow-ups. *Ghost Recon: Advanced Warfighter 2* is most definitely the latter, a game that bears more resemblance to an overinflated add-on (though admittedly a highly adept one) than a fully fledged sequel.

Of course, there's nothing intrinsically wrong with follow-ups. They're often just as much fun as their predecessors; sometimes even more so. It's just that to call them fully fledged sequels can be tad misleading. Take this tense and generally adept team-based tactical shooter. It's perfectly playable, highly enjoyable and, on the whole, well designed. But as you and your team of three special-forces Ghosts slink from shadow to shadow dispatching enemies with pinpoint headshots, it's impossible not be haunted by a niggling sense that you've been here before. And in a way, you have.

But more on this in a moment. For now, let's set the scene...

PICTURE THIS

Reprising your role as team leader Captain Scott Mitchell – an overconfident stereotype with a Marlboro rasp – you, along with your team of soldiers, must prevent a Mexican uprising from spilling over into the US of A.

Of course, if there's one thing worse than an uprising, it's an uprising involving the possession of nuclear weapons. With just 72 hours before the insurgents launch a few dozen megatons into the Land of the Free, you and your fellow special-ops warriors must track down and incapacitate all American-hating Mexicans by any means at your disposal.

Armed with futuristic weaponry (after all, this is 2014), including floating scout drones and the Cross-Com 2.0 – a system enabling you to see what your team-mates see – you have the ability to scythe through groups of enemies like a blowtorch through soiled toilet paper.

Each mission kicks off with an in-depth briefing during which (somewhat bizarrely)

See, I told you it was impossible to lean back that far and not fall over.



you're treated to real-life video footage of the war zone and animated snippets from a blustery general who tells you what's on the menu for the forthcoming operation. Once you've absorbed all this information, it's time to equip yourself with hardware and select your team from a collection of soldiers, each with their own abilities and personality. Well, that's if you count a one-paragraph description of their characters as a personality.

With the formalities over, it's time to get dropped into the war zone. Disappointingly, at no point does this involve being pushed out of an aircraft at several thousand feet and marvelling at the beauty of the world below you (as in the original); instead, you're

unceremoniously shipped from one place to the next via a chopper. Practical, perhaps, but where's the panache?

WE'RE IN

So you've made it to the ground, your heart pounding furiously in syncopated beats to the whopping of the chopper's rotors as it makes its way back to base. Dust clouds drift across abandoned roads, while burnt-out windows keep a silent vigil on the deserted streets. Somewhere within the confines of this concrete maze is the enemy, waiting, watching, fingers brushing triggers with impatient strokes.

Your team stand together, covering every angle, as you study your tactical map, pondering which route to take through the superbly designed level, a battlefield with a thousand opportunities for the canny commander to exploit. The crumbling town exudes detail and realism. Only something's wrong. An irksome voice in the back of your head keeps saying: "I've seen this all before, I've seen this all before." The crumbling Mexican locales. The eerie puffs of dust. The enemies entrenched behind abandoned



Being caught in the open like this usually results in death.



GRAW 2 makes more detours into refreshing new locations, including fortified haciendas, mountainous regions and desert expanses

trucks and behind stacked sandbags. And then it hits you like a tank shell. You *have* seen it all before, because it's just like playing the original all over again.

BUT...

That's not to say that this is a bad thing. *GRAW* was an outstanding game, and in many ways, so is this follow-up. While a nagging sense of déjà vu does tug at you like an insistent puppy on a shoelace, you'll also quickly find yourself immersed in the hugely entertaining adventure that unfolds before your unblinking, thousand-yard stare.

Perhaps the most striking difference between the two games is the variety of locations. Unlike its city-centric predecessor, *GRAW 2* makes many more detours into refreshing new locales, including fortified haciendas, meandering mountainous regions and searing desert expanses where the careless soldier will quickly lose his head to a distant sniper.

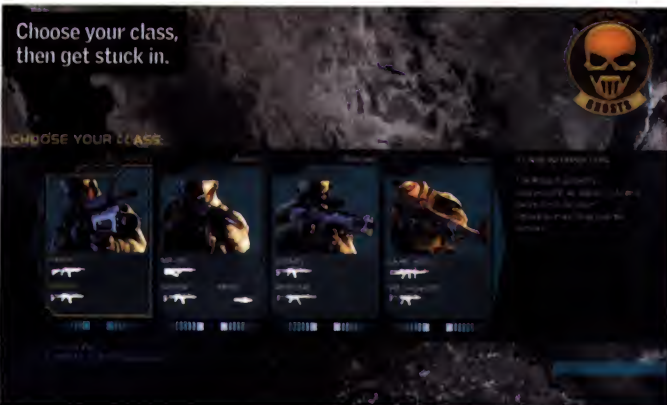
One mission may see you stalking through the rubble of a Mexican town, 'slicing the pie' (slowly peering round while presenting the smallest possible target at every corner) in a painstaking and brutally tense game of feline and rodent with the insurgents, using every hole in every wall to zoom in on an unsuspecting, exposed enemy head far off into the distance. Your next mission will have you running from one point of cover to the next, attempting to traverse a sprawling expanse of sand, ➔



Ally intelligence

If you get sick of the AI, you've always got your mates

Choose your class,
then get stuck in.



Perhaps *GRAW 2*'s most significant improvement over its predecessor is its truly excellent range of multiplayer options. Playing alongside intelligent human opponents suddenly propels the proceedings into a whole new dimension, making you realise just how incredible a game this actually is.

With a selection of classes for you to choose from, including Demolitions, Support, Rifleman and Assault, there are a host of game types just waiting to be enjoyed. Deathmatch, TDM and Co-op are self-explanatory, but there are also a couple of more innovative modes for you to sample. These include Hamburger Hill, a points-based mode which tasks you with capturing and holding territory; Recon vs Assault, which has one team using stealth and sabotage against a more heavily armed foe; and Siege, in which one team has to attack a building that the other one is trying to protect. These games are so much fun that I'd almost go as far as saying they're worth the entry fee alone. Almost...

Get an instant overview of the
vicinity with the tactical map.



skipping past bullets as you meander towards a heavily defended enemy base.

Each and every mission has been superbly designed, with gameplay often striking that elusive balance between action, tactics and realism. The more hardcore Ghosts will no doubt head straight for the merciless hardest difficulty setting, which should keep you occupied for 10-12 hours. If you're more soft-centred, meanwhile, you'll probably find a good 10-15 hours of testing entertainment on the still highly challenging (yet thankfully, not frustratingly so) normal setting. In fact, had it not been for the 'save anywhere' option, these numbers could easily have been doubled, as the temptation

Getting your team to stand this
close together is no easy feat.



to simply slap the save key every 20 paces is all too easy to succumb to.

The sheer attention to detail is also impressive. You and your team move with lifelike realism, stalking with raised guns and running with lowered weapons. Spot the enemy and you can hurl yourself onto the ground mid-sprint and monitor their movements with the superbly clear night-vision goggles. The physics are also of a high standard, despite the odd falling-through-treacle death animation. Glass shatters, sparks fly, vehicles buck as they're riddled with bullets and enemies crumple into broken heaps after you've introduced their craniums to a hail of lead.

GRRRRRRRR

Now for the bad news. As well as borrowing many of the fine features that made its predecessor so enthralling, *GRAW 2* also makes the cardinal mistake of carrying over many of its shortfalls. Given that tactical shooters such as this sell themselves on the premise of realism, it's always heartbreaking

to find AI that's more artificial ignorance than artificial intelligence.

For starters, your team-mates are morons. The whole idea of having a group of highly trained AI operatives under your command and a superbly streamlined context-sensitive interface to order them around with (where you simply point to where you want them to go and press a button to execute the order) is that they actually do what you tell them to.

Your soldiers are supposed to move and respond like a well-oiled machine, with discipline garnered from months of being yelled at by a booming sergeant-major and forced to clean out the latrines with their tongues. Yet for some reason they do the exact opposite. Tell them to take cover behind a wall and one of them will amble into a nearby enemy-held street, soak up a few bullets, complain he's being hit and then die. The other two will take up random positions within a six-mile radius of the wall (I'm exaggerating for effect, but I think you get the point), and stand around idly like they're in the middle of Manchester city centre rather than a war zone.

WHO NEEDS 'EM?

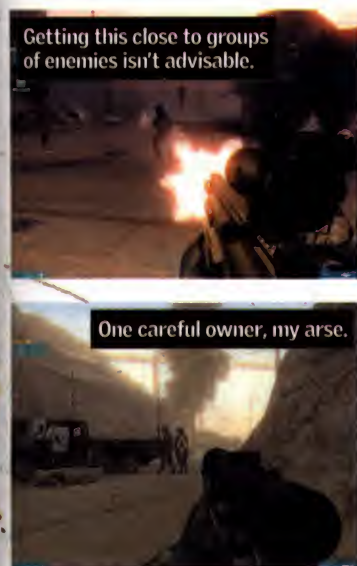
Strangely enough, *GRAW 2* actually becomes a better game once your team has been wiped out. Free from the threat of your idiotic sidekicks betraying your position every few minutes, the game suddenly takes on a new level of stealth and tension as you creep around on a solo crusade to complete your goals and prevent the US from turning into

I wonder if it used
to be double-glazed?





Your team-mates are morons. Tell them to take cover behind a wall and one of them will amble into a nearby street



Captain Bird's-eye

Issuing attack plans has never been easier



As well as ordering around your squad with the excellent context-sensitive point-and-click command interface, you also have the option to switch to a top-down tactical map, which provides a comprehensive bird's-eye view of the war zone. Displaying the location of all known enemies as well as the position of your team, it enables you to formulate and execute attack strategies for your AI sidekicks, including move, attack, recon and cover orders. Of course, whether your team actually does as it's told is another matter, but their ineptitude doesn't detract from the quality and intuitiveness of this excellent strategic tool.

a steaming wasteland of plutonium-soaked debris. If you play it smart, use stealth and utilise your surroundings, you'll find it more than possible to complete your tasks alone. You'll also have a blast.

As if to redress the balance, your enemies often (though not always) prove equally inept. As you wander around, you simply can't help but feel that the enemy has been mechanically dropped in by a designer. And while the insurgents do patrol and sometimes seek out and utilise cover, more often than not they just stand around staring into the horizon (even when you're right in front of them) and rarely employ recognisable teamwork. It's a problem that's particularly evident in night missions. Ultimately, your greatest challenge will come in identifying and neutralising entrenched snipers, who

shoot with deadly accuracy and are often ensconced in far-off hiding places.

More of a shuffle forward than a leap, *GRAW 2* can't really be described as the definitive next chapter of the *Ghost Recon* franchise. If *GRAW* was *Ghost Recon 3*, then *GRAW 2* is *Ghost Recon 3.5*. But while you may have seen much of it before, this is still an immensely entertaining piece of tactical team-based FPS goodness, which, if you can ignore the dodgy AI, will provide endless hours of tense, tactical shooting satisfaction. As follow-ups go, it's certainly up there with the best, if not quite the elite. **PCZ**

PCZONE

Graphics Decent but hugely power-hungry
Sound Superb musical score, realistic SFX and passable acting
Multiplayer The best thing about the game

- ✓ Diverse, detailed levels
- ✓ Brilliant in multiplayer
- ✓ Tense and tactical
- ✓ Great interface and strategic tools
- ✗ Too similar to *GRAW*
- ✗ Poor AI

80

GRAW 1.5

LOST PLANET: EXTREME CONDITION

Jon Blyth takes off his coat, gloves and scarf, and still doesn't feel the benefit

DEVELOPER Capcom
PUBLISHER Capcom
WEBSITE
www.lostplanet-thegame.com
ETA Out now
PRICE £29.99



AT A GLANCE...

Fight your way through various icy environments, shooting insects and non-seafaring pirates, in a series of impressive boss battles.

Minimum system requirements:

DX9: 2.8GHz HT processor, 512MB RAM, 256MB graphics card with Pixel Shader 3.0. DX10: Core 2 Duo, 1GB RAM, 256MB graphics card.

HOW IT STACKS

DEVIL MAY CRY 3 68%

LOST PLANET: EXTREME CONDITION 66%

RESIDENT EVIL 4 57%

LOST PLANET HAS rockets, and it also has science. But I don't think I'll be offending anyone at Capcom by suggesting that it's as far from rocket science as... Media studies. It's level after level of rampant insecticide, with very little in the way of diversion. Sure, there are a few humans knocking about, but in essence they're just smaller, less visually impressive things to kill.

You're Wayne. Hi. You've just watched your father get crushed by some green-eyed swine in the intro level. The Green Eye's one of the bigger Akrid insect-type creatures on the ice world. Anyone who's seen Van Damme in *Kickboxer* will know that revenge is a dangerous motive, but you don't care. You're dead-set on killing the chitinous prick that belly-flopped your pa. And that goes for any other Akrids – a race cursed by having evolved brightly glowing weak spots.

Clearly delineated targets aren't the only convenient thing about the Akrid – they also contain shiny red globules of Thermal Energy (T-ENG), and you need that to survive. Your T-ENG meter is a combination of medi-kit, battery and oxygen meter; it's constantly dwindling, and drops faster when you use energy weapons or take damage – and when it reaches zero, you start dying. At this point, you'll need to kill something or activate the waypoint beacons. Therein, Capcom hopes, lies a *Gauntlet*-esque sense of compelling urgency and drama.

The point, in terms of the gameplay, is that 'collecting stuff' isn't just optional fluff for completist types – you're hoovering up blood (heat, sorry) in order to survive. The potential urgency is dulled by the fact that there are plenty of fuel tanks, waypoints



and respawning fodder monsters knocking about, which only take one or two shots to kill, and don't pose much threat. You're normally only ever one bullet hose away from a refill.

Then there are the Vital Suits, designed by desperate humans to fight the Akrid. These mechanical exoskeletons have different powers. Some have double weapons, some can double-jump, and some can hover like... Well, like you're in *Mario Sunshine*. Clunking and whirring about is cool – especially trampling the fragile flesh of other humans – but they're a little slow to respond, and they do tend to blow up quickly, even taking my shitness into account.

DUMB AS AN EGG

Lost Planet does a great job of throwing you into the action and hurling big monsters and daft bosses at you, but at its soul, it's a very basic game. It's a quickly felt cycle of onslaught, boss, cut-scene and repeat. Distracting you from this are the explosions, which are massive and constant. Then there

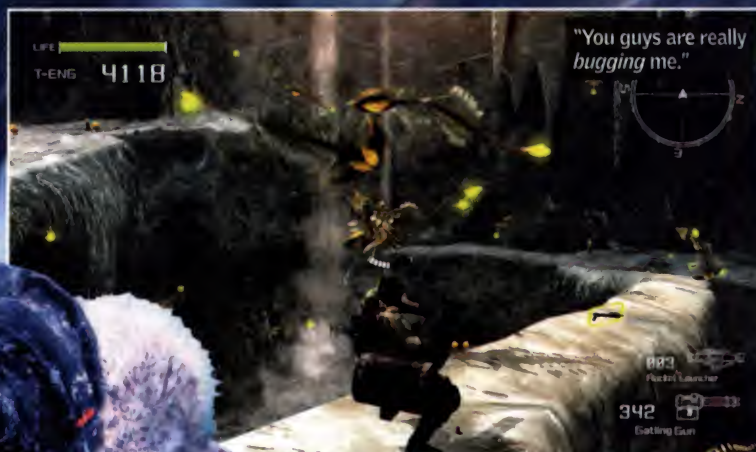
are the set-piece enemies, who are bigger and just as constant. It's quite possible to suspend that accursed analytical brain for a while and just enjoy yourself. For how long depends on how easily pleased you are.

On the platforming levels – where you generally have to get to the top of something – it's down to you and your grappling hook. These will give you a crippling Anti-Persian Syndrome. That is, you'll feel like the most ham-legged, dundering clod ever to fall off the same ledge three times. Getting knocked about by rockets, bombs and the vibrations from overhead moths (fact!) is fun in a *Die Hard* kind of way, but you do end up feeling a little bit pissed. Even the Vital Suits are pretty frail, and while they're fun to fanny about in, there's a slight reluctance to obey your commands that can really leave you feeling cheated in a boss battle.

Take your revenge fight with Green Eye – it's a medium-length battle with three stages, and it's a frigging pain when you're getting crushed against the wall by a massive carapace, with spears of ice slamming into your dad's Vital Suit, and the camera won't snap out of its involuntary neck-breaking aerial view. Actually, it could very well have changed angle, but you can't see shit for the relentless explosions. It's



At its soul, it's a very basic game: onslaught, boss, cut-scene, repeat



impressive, exciting and pretty satisfying to dispatch the patricidal arthropod. But it's also inelegant, unresponsive and frustrating.

At one point, I restarted the Green Eye level from the beginning rather than the waypoint, and I was faced with an already-fought corridor of pirates. Annoyed, I decided to run through the entire level, and was a little surprised to find that I made it through, without any serious damage or game penalty. Why did I bother the first time? It certainly wasn't to collect the hidden coins, which are the only 'bonus' items in the game. Even Capcom's traditional ranking system is missing – there's no S rank to strive for, and no experience to spend on bionic ankles. It boils down to that basic criticism again; this is pretty much



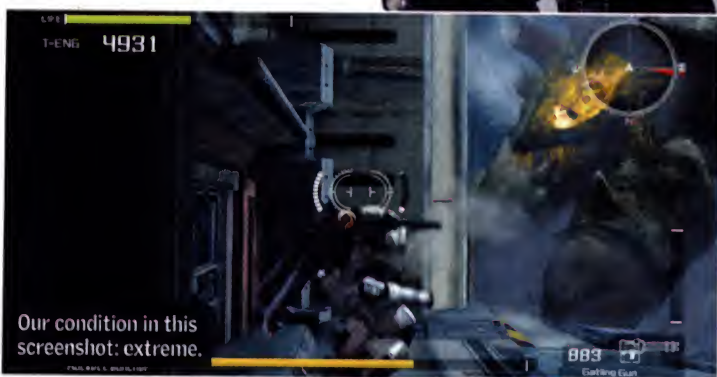
an amiable, mindless shooter, with a fairly lip-flubbing storyline to push things along.

WYE AYE THE AI

The AI is... Passable – certainly as intelligent as someone who's just smugly written the phrase "patricidal arthropod" in an attempt to sound educated – but it does have some suicidally dumb moments. In the first level, your colleagues run motionlessly into walls, and several enemies remained inactive in later levels until I'd shot them three times. "Ow! What was that? Ow! Is that what I think... Ow! Yes, it is – someone's shooting me! The bastard nerve of it!"

Additionally – and this might not be a deal-breaker for most people – I do have an expectation that if a guy is wearing gas cylinders on his back, I should be able to shoot said gas cylinders. And when I do that, he should say "Oooh, shit!", jump out of a window, put his hands over his crotch or something and then explode. Doesn't happen here. Twenty points off the final score.

I'm being harsh, I'll admit, but having played and enjoyed the 360 version on a happy, mindless level – it would have scored around 74 – the PC port seems to be lacking. My DX9 PC far exceeded the stated requirements, yet apart from a super-rapid spinning icon on the menus, the game itself chugged unhappily along



Why was DX10 scared?

Because seven ate nine...



Lost Planet will be available in two moderately tasty flavours. In the blue tub is DX9 – playable by all, and looking good, with the low frame-rate somewhat offset by stylised motion blur. In the red tub, looking lean, brutal and keen to prove itself, is DX10. Until *Alan Wake* and *Crysis* give the new system the chance to set bold new boundaries for PC gaming, will *Lost Planet* give us a taste of what graphics lie in store?

There's a short and a long answer – the short answer is a gurgle of frustration, and the long answer is... Yes, there are some improvements to be had from owning the latest rig – but certainly not enough to warrant an upgrade. But then, *Lost Planet* is a console port rather than a DX10 game, so the myriad wonders of PC gaming's illustrious future (and our sarcasm setting, you'll be surprised to hear, is currently only at 15%) have yet to reveal themselves to us. Bring 'em on...

The AI has some dumb moments. Several enemies remained inactive until I'd shot them three times

at between 15-25fps, and suffered at busier times. Get Vista? Not for this game I won't.

CONTROL FREAK

Finally, *Lost Planet* isn't designed to be played with mouse and keyboard. You can do it, but nudging the mouse a fraction equates to a clumsy nudge on a thumbstick, making precise aiming impossible. To rub it in, there's no mouse-sensitivity slider, and when you do play with a 360 controller, there's no option to invert the Y axis. If this is the future of Vista gaming – console gaming in a swivel chair – then I'm going to fold my arms and frown.

If I'm sounding like I didn't enjoy *Lost Planet*, then I'm sorry. I can definitely say I was entertained, and there's a fair chunk of fun to be wrung from the sponge – even with the limited multiplayer modes. In the end though, it's just a good – not brilliant – inelegant PC port. **PCZ**

PCZONE

Graphics Big, white, nice
Sound Explode! Talk. Explode!
Multiplayer Yes, both co-op and deathmatch

- ✓ Tense, exciting
- ✓ More explosions than I'm used to
- ✓ I took a rocket to the face and lived
- ✗ Snow can only be so pretty
- ✗ Belongs on that other Microsoft thing
- ✗ Arise, Sir Chugsalot

66

All white



DRIVER: PARALLEL LINES

Steve Hill is keeping two chevrons apart...

DEVELOPER Ubisoft Reflections
PUBLISHER Ubisoft
WEBSITE www.ubi.com
ETA Out now
PRICE £19.99

AT A GLANCE...

A console port from 2006, it's pretty much an irrelevance on PC, but a mildly entertaining one nonetheless.

Minimum system requirements:
 2GHz processor, 256MB RAM and a 64MB graphics card.

HOW IT STACKS

GTA: SAN ANDREAS 92%
 DRIVER: PARALLEL LINES 73%
 STARKY & HUTCH 60%

THE DRIVER 3 debacle sullied the series so grievously that when *Parallel Lines* limped out on last-gen consoles over a year ago, it was greeted with almost universal indifference. In truth, it was a marked improvement, bolstered by an extensive period soundtrack (much of which is sadly missing from this belated PC port). That period is New York in 1978, a time of big hair, big trousers and big cars. It's the latter that mainly concerns you, as an up-and-coming getaway driver – adopt movie trailer voice – earning his stripes on the mean streets of The Big Apple.

You can pretty much guess the rest: a *GTA*-lite affair comprising a variety of automotive missions interspersed with mercifully brief gunplay. While the on-foot

sections are a minor step-up from the previous game, hanging out of the car window to shoot your enemies is a fairly haphazard affair.

Driving is where developer Reflections specialise though, and the big-muscle cars handle appropriately, augmented by a selection of bikes, trucks and other vehicles. There's a lucrative racing scene, and an extensive vehicle customisation model, although most of the missions can be completed by nicking a car off the street.

CHASE ME

Initially, it seems like you're largely going through the motions, but when you notice that you've clocked up 500 miles you must be doing something right, and it eventually begins to feel like you're playing a proper game. In fact, at its best it feels like you're starring in a '70s car chase movie, doffing its cap to such classics as *The French Connection*. If you fluff your lines it's fairly unforgiving though, often forcing you to repeat large swathes of a mission.

Cruising round NYC listening to the likes of Blondie (from whose seminal album the title is lifted) gives it all a

suitably chilled '70s vibe. However, in a significant plot twist, suddenly it's 2006 and you're in a Japanese hatchback being bombarded by angry rap, at which point it starts to feel a bit generic. Still, for 20 quid, it's a half-decent ride while it lasts. **PC7**

PCZONE

Graphics Last-gen console standard
 Sound Some decent tunes and chat
 Multiplayer No

- ✓ Decent driving model
- ✓ Authentic period feel
- ✓ Watchable cut-scenes
- ✗ Truncated soundtrack
- ✗ Unforgiving save-points
- ✗ Ropy shooting

73

Happy Shopper NY GTA





PACIFIC STORM: ALLIES

Steven James O'Hagan copes with a tsunami of real-time strategic detail...

DEVELOPER Lesta Studio
PUBLISHER Excalibur
WEBSITE
www.excalibur-publishing.co.uk/psa.htm
ETA Out now
PRICE £29.99

AT A GLANCE...

WWII in the Pacific recreated on a massive scale in a two-tier RTS that lets you pilot single ships and aircraft.

Minimum system requirements:
 2GHz processor, 512MB RAM
 and a 128MB graphics card.

HOW IT STACKS

STAR WARS: EMPIRE AT WAR 85%
BATTLESTATIONS: MIDWAY 68%
PACIFIC STORM: ALLIES 47%

HOT ON THE heels of *Battlestations: Midway* comes another epic RTS/simulation hybrid covering the fight between the Allies and the Japanese in the Pacific during WWII. Unlike its fun-but-slightly-dumbed-down arcade cousin, the emphasis here is on the astounding scale of the conflict, and on fiddly real-time strategy rather than shooting things to pieces in person.

The concept is great: a *Total War*-style strategic recreation of the war, with you controlling all building and construction options on the zoomed-out map, and then taking control of individual battles as you and the enemy clash over control of individual territories.

But ye gods, running a massive war-effort spanning thousands of square miles of ocean, fleets of ships, armies of men and squadrons of planes is a headache. Troops have to be shipped to bases, engineers provided to build installations, pilots available to man aircraft, sailors delivered to crew warships.

The sad thing is that military housekeeping appears to absorb approximately 95% of your time, with all

those 'boring' tasks such as piloting torpedo bombers on death-defying attack runs on enemy carriers and manning anti-aircraft guns against Japanese Kamikaze assaults reduced to something of a sideshow.

BRAIN GOES POP

When you do find time to put down the spreadsheets and have a battle, they're often massive-scale affairs, simultaneously challenging your graphics card to render every bomb, bullet and bulkhead, and your cranium to keep track of what's going down.

This latter task isn't helped by an ungainly interface that can't cope with the millions of planes and ships throwing buckets of hot lead at each other, often reducing you to panicked spectator, trying to suss out who's doing what to whom and why. Jumping into the cockpit of any plane or behind the guns of any ship is always an option, although in a basically pointless sim-lite fashion.

Allies is in fact a sequel to a game so good it never got a release over here in the first place, adding the British Empire, as well as a few other cosmetic tweaks to

the mix. But developers Lesta have bitten off far more than they can chew, and in doing so are left with a pained look of defeat on their faces, aircraft carriers, dive bombers and fortified island garrisons sliding down their chin and staining their bib. **PCZ**

PCZONE

Graphics Great scale, poor detail
 Sound Passable
 Multiplayer Yes

- ✓ Impressive scope
- ✓ Controlling aircraft is fun
- ✗ Almost impossible to manage
- ✗ Gameplay varied, but unpolished
- ✗ AI is feeble

47

Massively ambitious, massively unplayable



BAD MOJO

Pure, unadulterated, relentless filth

DEVELOPER Pulse Entertainment
PUBLISHER XIDER Games
WEBSITE www.xider-games.com
ETA Out now
PRICE £9.99

Min system req:

1.5GHz processor, 256MB RAM
and a 64MB graphics card (it says
here, although you could probably
run it on a ZX Spectrum just fine)



WHY WOULD ANYONE want to reissue a 1996 FMV-based adventure-game in the current climate, when the last time either FMVs or, indeed, adventures really held any cachet with gamers was, well, 1996?

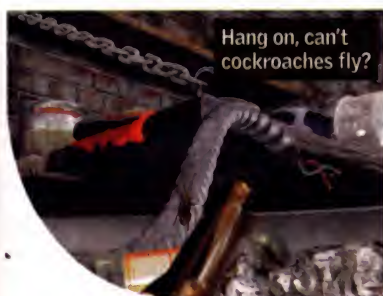
Twenty-second game summary: you play a grubby loser turned into a cockroach by your dead mother for some reason, having to find your way back so you can redeem your morally lax outlook on life and reunite with your father. You do this by scrabbling around your low-rent apartment and surrounding locales, nudging detritus to solve puzzles and sitting through the occasional video clip.

OK, an original premise, but like Bernard Manning, it's not ageing well. No effort has been made to revamp

anything for a modern audience, you're stuck with a minuscule 640x480 resolution, the few extras included in the 2004 reissue have gone missing and you can skip the whole thing and just watch the movie clips directly by opening the files on the CD anyway.

Then there's the truly repellent content. You basically spend the game living the cockroach life from a top-down view, going from one rancid screen of filth and gut-churning decay to the next. After a while it feels so relentlessly grimy that you just want to shower for a fortnight. Especially when the realisation hits that you've essentially paid someone a tenner to experience the 'fun' of crawling around shit-filled garbage and rotting carcasses. That's no kind of life.

Paul Presley



PCZONE
12
A 'bugged' joke, perhaps?



FLYBOYS

Basically down diddly-down down

DEVELOPER iEntertainment Network
PUBLISHER JoWood/Interactive Magic
WEBSITE www.flyboysgame.com
ETA Out now
PRICE £19.99 (+ \$13.95 monthly subscription for online game)

Min system req:

1.0GHz processor, 256MB RAM
and a 64MB graphics card



BASED ON THE exciting blockbuster motion-picture event (soon to be found in your local DVD rental store hidden behind the collected output of Jean-Claude Van Damme and next to the bargain bin, if not in it), *Flyboys* wins the awards for this month's most unintentionally camp game title and the game with the most confused heritage and release state.

This is basically Interactive Magic's *Dawn Of Aces* online shooter with a handful of single-player 'training' missions based around scenes from the film. And, well, it's not very good. It has horrifically dated graphics, a sparse online population, tedious gameplay, an unfathomable online interface and a lack of progressive challenge. Add to that the less-than-stellar flight models and the fact you

can download and play *Dawn Of Aces/Warbirds* pretty much for free anyway, thus eliminating any need for anyone to pay for this. And finish it off by noting that it's also hampered by being attached to an utterly pointless licence that the distributors call "an aviation masterpiece", and that's mislabelled as gay musical porn in your local Blockbuster.

Many moons ago, back in 1990, the gaming world was captivated by a WWI flight sim called *Red Baron*. It was the best thing on computers at the time, and ever since, the flight-sim world has wanted to recapture its magic. *Flyboys* is less 'magic' and more Paul Daniels telling you to pick a card from a deck and then using it to slice your tongue open before pissing in your bleeding mouth.

Paul Presley



PCZONE
22
War's a horrid thing

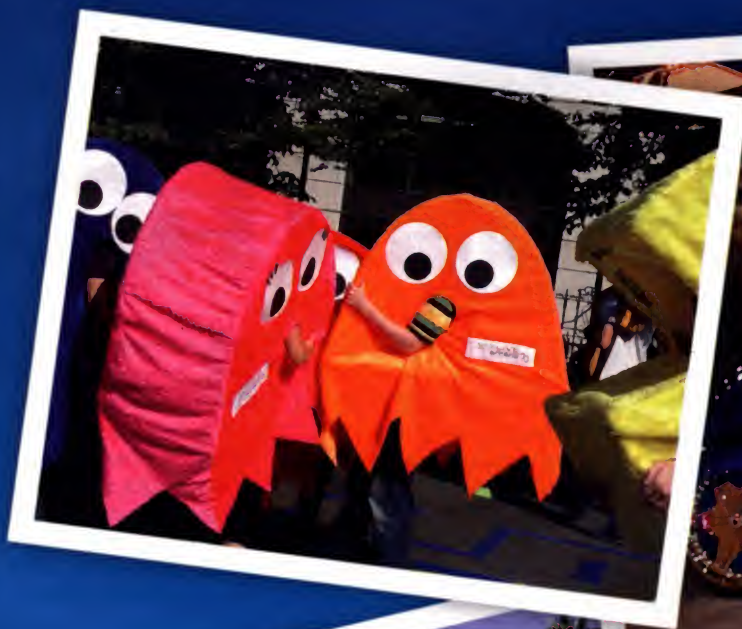
PIC & WIN SNAP UP A PRIZE

Share your summer snaps ... and win great prizes!

Summer's here so it's time to get your camera out and get snapping. Take any opportunity – the kids in the garden, a fancy dress party, a ride on your bike, a holiday exploration – wherever you're up to, whatever the shot, you could be in with a chance of winning a great prize...

You don't need to be an expert to enter, you just need to capture a great moment, whether it's a work of brilliance taken on an expensive camera, or a quick snap from a mobile phone.

To enter, simply choose a photo of yours that you like, head over to www.summersnaps.com to upload the shot and then keep an eye on your email to see if you're a winner.



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Gives *Total War* a run for its money.

SWORD OF THE STARS: BORN OF BLOOD

More battles beyond the bloody stars

DEVELOPER Kerberos Productions

PUBLISHER Lighthouse
Interactive/Gamer's Gate

WEBSITE bornofblood.swordofthestars.com

ETA Out now

PRICE €24.99 (£17 - download-only from Gamer's Gate)

Min system req:

1GHz processor, 512MB RAM
and a 128MB graphics card



Loved by its fans and missed by almost everyone else, *Sword Of The Stars* was perhaps the best RT4X game of the last year. The RT4X genre is 'real-time *Civilization* in space'. Take charge of a race, lead them through space to glory, to the detriment of all other races.

But first, the bad news: *Born Of Blood* still looks like it's been created using the 3D digital equivalent of poster paint and potato shapes. Whether you'd find the graphics charming or infantile is a matter of taste, but *SOTS* made a far greater impact on the gelatinous blob that lies behind the retina.

As standalone expansions go, *BOB* is cheap enough, but unless you really loved the original like a first-born

child, you're hardly going to be that bothered with what is a new race, some added units and ship sections, along with a tweaked user interface.

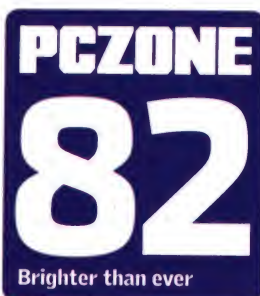
Sure, there's more to it than that, but the single-player still lacks any narrative progression. In fact, it isn't until you spend some time in-game that you notice the changes. And when you do, about 70 turns in, they explode like a firework.

BOB also features turn-based pondering - now with trade and diplomacy too - interspersed with short, sharp real-time battles that almost rival the best of what *Total War* has to offer. In multiplayer though, it beats it hands-down.

Richie Shoemaker



Fly, my pretty!



You can't hear it in this screenshot, but this is noisy.

RACE: CATERHAM

Feel the wind in your hair...



DEVELOPER Simbin

PUBLISHER Eidos

WEBSITE www.race-game.org/caterham/index.htm

ETA Out now

PRICE \$4.95 (£2.50) - Steam

Min system req:

1.7GHz processor, 512MB RAM
and a 128MB graphics card



THERE'S NOT MANY times when, as a games journalist, you can talk about the subjects you're playing with any measure of authority. I mean, none of us have actually fought with Jedis, shot Nazis in WWII or directed the great armies of Rome. At least not in our waking life.

RACE's expansion however, with its three Caterhams (visually identical but with different power outputs) and two extra tracks (Imola and Estoril), is an exception to the rule. You see, I was lucky enough to have a Caterham 7 grace my driveway for an entire weekend a few months ago. So nerrrrr.

With the noise of the real-life Caterham still ringing in my ears, I eagerly set about comparing the in-game cars to the real thing. Thankfully, Simbin have nailed the

important stuff; the exterior modelling, the raucous noise made by the cars, the sparse but functional interiors and the well-recreated handling (tons of grip followed by major powerslides) are all present and correct. They've also included my favourite thing from my experience of the real-life car - the pops and bangs from the exhaust when you let off the throttle.

There are a few niggles like pop-up and the graphics still looking a little flat, but I far preferred *Caterham* to vanilla *RACE*. And at this price, it's fantastic value (and was even free for the first couple of days, to thank the fans). Plus, you'll never have to make a prat of yourself clambering out of one as you do in real life. Bonus.

Suzy Wallace



"What lovely trees they are."



Tagan

power of silence

2-FORCE II DESIGNED IN GERMANY FOR GAMING PC'S

TG900-U33 900W
TG800-U33 800W
TG700-U33 700W
TG600-U33 600W
TG500-U33 500W
TG400-U33 400W

12V rails TURBO
Mode switch

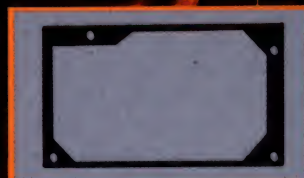
Anti-scratch black
painted case

Large I/O switch with
water-proof cover

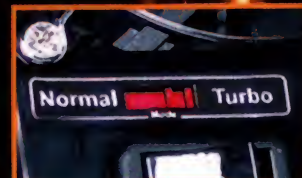


Embedded AC socket to avoid
interference with PC case

Chinese designed
ventilation



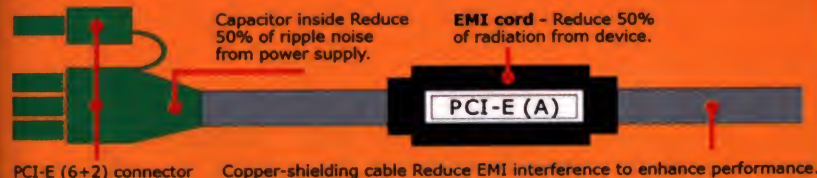
Anti-shock and vibration rubber
to avoid damage and noise..



12V rails TURBO
Mode Switch

REMI Technology

Germany Patent: 202005005007



Unique ground wire with
golden pin



Black mesh cables to optimize
airflow and thermal release.



HARRY POTTER AND THE ORDER OF THE PHOENIX

Suzy Wallace finds out if the boy-wizard has the magic touch...



DEVELOPER EA UK
PUBLISHER EA
WEBSITE
www.masterthemagic.com
ETA Out now
PRICE £29.99



AT A GLANCE...

A GTA-style romp through the world of Potter, with free-roaming, mouse-traced spells and official voice-overs.

Minimum system requirements:
1.6GHz processor, 256MB RAM and a 32MB graphics card.

HOW IT STACKS

HARRY POTTER AND THE ORDER OF THE PHOENIX **79%**
HARRY POTTER AND THE GOBLET OF FIRE **73%**
HP: THE PRISONER OF AZKABAN **68%**

I'M SAT IN a small, dark room, lit only by a flickering spotlight. Will Porter stalks determinedly round my chair. Suddenly he leans in close and whispers menacingly in my ear: "Have you read the books? Seen the films?" At last he crumples, defeated, into a nearby chair and, with a sigh of resignation, agrees to hand over the review.

Despite always enjoying the films, I've never transcended into Porter-like levels of devotion or participated in debates over which side Severus Snape is really on. So it was with some surprise that I found myself strangely captivated by the game. *OOTP* is a vast improvement on the other *Harry Potter* titles, and perhaps the first one to really do the franchise justice.

Set in a free-roaming Hogwarts, the game features all of the locations fans have grown to love in glorious detail, from

the animated paintings on the Grand Staircase to the pumpkin patch at Hagrid's Hut. The cast are all present and correct too, with accurate likenesses of the on-screen actors and official voice-overs featured. Plus, there's more than a hint of *GTA* influence as you discover some of the many side-quests, collecting missions, secret passages and mini-games dotted around the wizard's school. As such, there's plenty to do beyond the main storyline, and the experience of exploring Hogwarts is made thoroughly enjoyable by the attention to detail EA have lavished upon this episode.

SPELLBINDING

You'll also get hands-on experience with spells, as casting them is accomplished by moving the mouse in patterns while holding down one of the mouse buttons. Obviously inspired by the Wii controller, unfortunately the success rate of spell-casting on PC differs from great (when you initially learn the spell) to disastrous (when you actually really need it).

OOTP has some minor issues, most noticeably the Marauder's Map that annoyingly doesn't store any quest details, and the fact that Ron and Hermione can block you into tight spaces, leading me to call them names that I'm pretty sure

don't crop up in Potter's vocabulary. But overall, EA seem to have worked their magic to make *OOTP* an instantly likeable, captivating and lengthy game for kids and fans alike. Even if you're too old to be caught reading the book. **W**

PCZONE

Graphics Richly detailed locations and good likenesses
Sound Decent sound effects and official voice-overs
Multiplayer Nope

- ✓ Excellent recreation of Hogwarts
- ✓ Official character likenesses and voice-overs
- ✓ Great attention to detail
- ✓ Plenty to keep you amused
- ✗ Spell-casting doesn't always work
- ✗ Ron and Hermione - get out of the way!

79
Top of the Potters



Nintendo®

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We look forward to *Battlefield 2: Miss Selfridge Assault*.

THE SIMS 2: H&M FASHION STUFF



Oh honestly, this can fuck right off

DEVELOPER EA
PUBLISHER EA
WEBSITE thesims2.ea.com
ETA Out now
PRICE £99.99

Min system req:
1GHz processor, 256MB RAM
and a 32MB graphics card



HERE IS WHAT I think happened (but did not happen) at a recent party when one man in a suit met another man in a suit next to a punch-bowl filled with molten diamonds. One man said his job was, for want of a better description, to pump out awful money-sponging updates for *The Sims 2*.

The other man said his job was, for want of a better description, to generate soul-destroying advertising deals for a clothing company. They both sighed at this point, and looked into one another's vacant eyes. Words weren't needed. This content pack was created then.

"Harold, what's wrong?" a wife would later ask her bedraggled husband. "This one's really bad Sarah," he would admit. "It's 60 sodding

outfits from H&M... And we're charging *ten pounds* for it."

"People will still buy it," she insisted. Harold raised his hand and struck his wife hard across the face, spilling his scotch on the carpet. The carpet they'd bought with that *devil* money. He knew she was right, but he hated what they had both become.

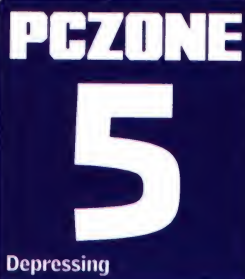
He hadn't sailed in seven years. Maybe he should go sailing again. Those were the last random thoughts his suffering brain delivered to him as the rope tightened around his neck. How cruel. His frantic kicking relaxed. He was sailing now.

This content pack really is unmitigated bum.

Steve Hogarty



13% of the content is in this screenshot.



There's still no 'Ride Dog Around The House' button.

THE SIMS: PET STORIES

101 damnations

DEVELOPER EA
PUBLISHER EA
WEBSITE thesims2.ea.com
ETA Out now
PRICE £29.99

Min system req:
1.8GHz processor, 512MB RAM
and a 32MB graphics card



There's a cat too, but you have to unlock it.



"Bad dog. It's your fault I live alone."

IHAVE A dog. I love dogs. The best thing my dog ever did was run into my neighbour's house and come trotting back out with an entire cooked chicken in his mouth. That was my old dog though. He is dead.

I have *The Sims: Pet Stories*. I don't like it much. It's the sequel to *The Sims: Life Stories*, and it follows an identical template to that game. You play what is essentially a cut-down version of *The Sims 2* with the *Pets* expansion installed, and must take one of two pets through a particular storyline. The *Pets* expansion existed when *The Sims: Life Stories* came out, so why they didn't include pets in the first of these story-based *Sims* games is a mystery (the solution to which is this: money).

To be fair, this is the sort of thing that'd make a decent gift for somebody who doesn't really know

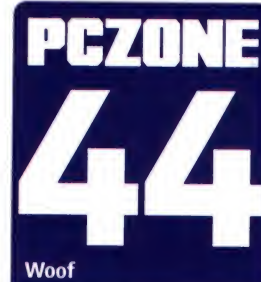
how computer contraptions work. It'd be all too easy to take the piss out of how running the game in a window is listed as a feature on the back of the box, as is *pausing* – yes, somebody put *pausing* in a bullet-point – but the fact remains that as this is standalone, it retains the *Sims*' charm and appeal.

You really would be better off buying *The Sims 2* and its *Pets* expansion though, and making up your own stories in your head.

Steve Hogarty



Feeling angry? Punch the family pet.



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international



ATTACK ON PEARL HARBOR

Just plane easy....

DEVELOPER Legendo Entertainment
PUBLISHER CDV Software
WEBSITE www.pearlharbor-game.com
ETA Out now
PRICE £29.99

Min system req:
2GHz processor, 512MB RAM
and a 64MB graphics card.

IN THE REAL world, flying a fighter plane is incredibly taxing, involving a level of skill that takes years to hone. But not in *Attack On Pearl Harbor*. In fact, I'm pretty sure you could fly around one-handed, with a fag and a pint on the go at the same time.

So, the plus points are that this does possess a certain amount of pick-up-and-play charm, with a flying model that's simple enough for anyone to take to the skies with ease. That said, it's impossible to pull off any decent moves (rolls, loops etc), and your plane bounces off others (think aerial bumper cars without the pikeys), so *Attack On Pearl Harbor*'s likely to prove too rookie for most.

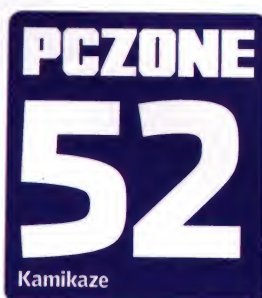
The campaign mode offers a surprising amount of content, with two separate campaigns for both the Americans and Japanese that cover



most of the Pacific battles of WWII and a choice of missions, ensuring even more variety upon replay.

Annoyingly, there's no way to change the controls and looks-wise, it won't win any medals. There are some attempts at neat touches such as a blurred horizon and volumetric clouds, but they sit on top of an ageing engine. But even spectacular effects aren't enough to hide the fact that unless you're five, *AOPH* doesn't offer much of a challenge.

Suzy Wallace



ENEMY ENGAGED 2

Not all that engaging...

DEVELOPER Gameyus Interactive
PUBLISHER GMX Media
WEBSITE www.eech2.com
ETA Out now
PRICE £29.99

Min system req:
2GHz processor, 512MB RAM
and a 64MB graphics card.



BLIMEY. FROM THE easy-as-pie proceedings of *Attack On Pearl Harbor*, to this. Talk about polar opposites. You see, if I had to rate *Enemy Engaged 2* on a scale of 1-10 for difficulty, it would disappear off the top end of the scale.

This is a truly hardcore helicopter combat sim. I thought I was pretty good at aviation-related stuff, but it took me 20 minutes to figure out how to set up my controller and take-off. It's compounded by a lack of a tutorial or intro mission, so if you buy this, let's hope you've played the original or have the patience to wade through the 232-page, PDF-only manual.

In fact, little seems to have changed from the original. Despite all the military equipment being swathed in glorious hi-res textures, most of the other textures (including the ground, which you'll spend most



of your time looking at) have hardly improved at all since the first game. And that was seven years ago. Which doesn't bode well.

To summarise: yes, the dynamic missions provide plenty to do, and hardcore helicopter sim fans will undoubtedly be cock-a-hoop at the über-realistic controls. For anyone who hasn't already got a helicopter licence though, playing *Enemy Engaged 2* is about as much fun as eating a pair of sheep's testicles. Yum.

Suzy Wallace



TEXT TO WIN

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80876**



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SHREK THE THIRD

They think it's all ogre...

DEVELOPER Beenox
PUBLISHER Activision
WEBSITE
www.shrekthethirdgame.com
ETA Out now
PRICE £29.99

Min system req:
800MHz processor, 512MB RAM
and a 64MB graphics card

WITH THE ADVENT of summer comes the third film of the franchise. With the advent of the third film comes the inevitable game tie-in. And with the advent of the game comes the unavoidable groans as we're forced to play yet another distinctly average movie-to-game tie-in.

This time around you're subject to a platform experience in which you play as the green-skinned Wayne Rooney lookalike himself. Later on, you'll also get to take control of Donkey, Puss In Boots and others, but with repetitive gameplay consisting of collecting coins and orbs, beating up enemies and jumping around linear levels, it really doesn't make that much difference who you're playing.

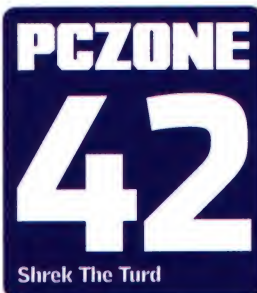
There are some enjoyable mini-games but invisible walls, an unfunny



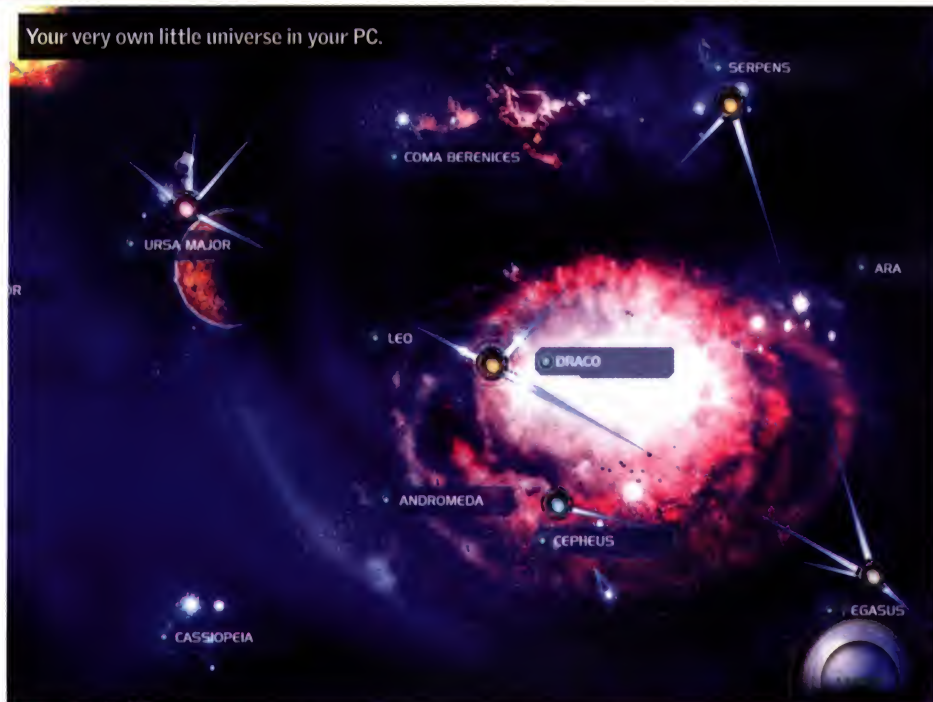
script and rubbish soundalikes in place of the film's all-star voiceover cast are just the beginning of the bad stuff. Within barely 30 seconds of the game being turned on, someone bears down on your character and you're told to "Press [an icon of a green hand] to punch". But even in the control set-up screen, there's no mention of the icons. So you're just left to figure it out for yourself, while your character gets a pasting and you stare befuddled at the screen.

The problem with most games that tie in with current movie releases is that they're awkward, clumsy and unpolished affairs that feel like they've been tacked on just to make more cash from the film release. As demonstrated here.

Suzi Wallace



Your very own little universe in your PC.



Who else remembers when space was 'black, with stars'?



Lugging cargo from one side of the galaxy to the other is never fun.

SPACE FORCE: ROGUE UNIVERSE

Dan Marshall has been smuggling futuristic smack between galaxies...

DEVELOPER Provox Games
PUBLISHER JoWood
WEBSITE
www.spaceforce-game.com
ETA Out now
PRICE £19.99



AT A GLANCE...

Lonely, ham-fisted deep-space trading sim with scrummy visuals let down by a bummy lack of attention to detail.

Minimum system requirements:
1.4GHz processor, 512MB RAM
and a 128MB graphics card.

HOW IT STACKS

X3: REUNION 92%

FREELANCER 84%

SPACE FORCE:
ROGUE UNIVERSE 70%

NOT SO LONG ago, I'd have been sat here comparing this game to *Elite*. It seems *X3* has finally taken Braben classic's crown, and is now the yardstick by which all space sim trade 'em ups are to be judged.

Space Force genuinely measures up strikingly well. It has solid visuals, a pleasant enough universe to explore and a thumpingly hammy sci-fi 'plot' to ignore...

SPACE FARCE

The problem is, it never looks quite as good as *X3*. It never really has that sense of universal cohesion that made *X3* such a delight to 'dick about in'. The acting and script are beyond appalling, the economy pales next to *X3*'s levels of intricacy and it simply doesn't offer the same degree of high-on inexhaustible freedom. The dogfighting's largely laborious and the RPG free-roaming mode is only really there for you to ignore once you've finished with the story mode.

In fact, the only time *Space Force* ever really manages to usurp its competitor is in a few flashy HDR effects. While there's

something impressively satisfying about losing aim on a villainous pirate as he flies in front of a glaring sun, it's hardly a deal-breaker.

Despite all that though, *Space Force* remains a damned good blast. It's filled with stuff to do, things to buy and bad men to vaporise. The only major stumbling block is in polish – exemplified by a criminal lack of introductory hand-holding.

Normally, I'm dead against tutorials that force me to learn how to duck into a vent. However, in an initially bewildering game like *Space Force* where every button-press has a unique and improbable function, leaving me to my own devices to discover which key does what is downright dangerous, and resulted in an unfortunate and improbable series of events which saw me accidentally selling my ship's guns to some passing ruffian and then left me unable to buy new ones with which to, you know, survive.

If you've exhausted *X3* to an inhuman degree, you could do a lot worse than check this out, especially given the bargain price tag. Just don't expect it to be as good and you won't be disappointed. **PCZ**

PCZONE

Graphics Surprisingly amazing
Sound Forgettable effects,
perfect music
Multiplayer Nope, it's a solo flight

- ✓ Impressive visuals
- ✓ Plenty to do and see
- ✓ Suitably over-the-top explosions
- ✗ Terrible quality 1997-esque pre-rendered intro
- ✗ Throws you in at the deep end
- ✗ Lacks finesse

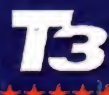
70

X girlfriend

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You won't find any of these indie games in the shops, but you can download them or get trial versions on our DVD.

IndieZone



Three games scoring 70+ in one month? This month's Indie Zone is so hot, we're having to blow on it first for ages. *Martin Korda* licks his lips...

CHOCOLATE CASTLE

DEVELOPER Lexaloffle Games
WEBSITE www.lexaloffle.com
PRICE \$19.95 (£10)

THIS LOOKS A bit rubbish doesn't it? Kiddy visuals, no gimmicks, music straight from an '80s Casio keyboard demo? But wait, what's this? An eclectic mix of mind-meltingly vexing puzzles that'll have you tearing your hair out? Now we're talking.

Chocolate Castle is one of those rare and delightful puzzle games that's not only challenging and fun, but hugely original too. Here's the score. A screen is filled with different coloured blocks of chocolate that can be moved around and linked up. Dotted around the level are animals that can eat chocolate of a corresponding colour to themselves. All you have to do is drag the animals onto

the chocolate in order to clear the screen. Sounds simple, right? Well think again, because we're talking serious cerebral conundrums here that'll keep you pondering till the wee small hours. Be warned: you will start bleeding from your ears, especially if you play on the crushingly hard highest difficulty setting.

Thanks to an infinite Undo function you can try as many different tactics as you like without being penalised, allowing you to focus on the pure, unadulterated fun of devouring mounds of chocolate without the need for a girdle. Puzzle games don't get much better than this.

PCZONE
82

INDIEZONE
GAME OF THE MONTH



The harder puzzles will make your brain beg for mercy.



Can you beat all-comers and become immortal?

MAGI

DEVELOPER Thomas 'TeeGee' Grochowiak
WEBSITE www.getmagi.com PRICE \$19.95 (£10)

IT'S ALWAYS A real pleasure to come across games like *Magi* – bold stabs at innovation that move away from the copycat norm so often associated with the indie gaming circuit.

You play an apprentice wizard who must battle his way through a collection of increasingly taxing opponents to attain immortality. Catch is, you only have a certain number of years in which to do this (one battle = one year), meaning you can't afford to capitulate too many times on your path towards everlasting life.

Once you've customised your character's profession, skills and stats on the slightly unclear character-creation screen, it's off to do battle. You and your opponent stand on

opposite ends of an arena firing spells, which range from shields and fireballs to summoning hordes of insects or other nasties to attack your foe.

Thanks to its intuitive interface, it's only a matter of minutes till you're completely at ease with the battle mechanics, meaning you can concentrate on outfoxing your foe instead. And while the excitement does begin to wane after a few hours, *Magi's* myriad enemies, copious levelling-up options and top-notch soundtrack ensure that it's still an action-RPG experience well worth checking out.

PCZONE
78

SCAVENGER

DEVELOPER Pi Eye Games WEBSITE www.pieyegames.com PRICE \$19.95 (£10)

WE'VE SEEN THIS type of top-down arcade blaster before, but where *Scavenger* manages to trump many of its competitors is in the sheer quality of its frenetic, skill-based flying action.

Controlling your spacecraft with the mouse (left-button for thrusters, right-button for weapons), you must meander through a collection of increasingly labyrinthine levels, collecting gems and orbs while blasting enemy craft and slaloming around turret fire.

The plot is presented in a comic-strip format, but you'll soon find yourself skipping through these throwaway

segments to get back into the action, which requires some nifty flying on your part. On the downside, *Scavenger's* bosses are hardly the most daunting collection of badasses we've ever seen, while it's also annoying that your shields get sapped every time you graze a wall.

Apart from these two gripes, there's little here to criticise. *Scavenger* is slick, fast, challenging and fun, rammed with power-ups and neat touches. When all's said and done, what more could you want from a top-down blast-fest?

PCZONE
70



Hardly original, but fun nonetheless.

RETRO RECORDS

DEV Sortasoft WEB www.sortasoft.com PRICE £19.99 (£10)



Drag the corresponding pictures onto the crates.

AFTER A MONTH of bountiful indie gaming excellence, we come crashing back to Earth with a spine-splitting crash with this by-numbers puzzle game – and I use the word 'puzzle' in the loosest possible sense.

Records emblazoned with album covers drop from the top of the screen into crates. It's your job to drag the corresponding album cover (from a selection on the right-hand side of the screen, which you can add to from your own CD/record collection) onto the crate in order to attain a match. Match ten records and you fill a crate. Fill enough crates and

you win the level. It really is as untaxing as that.

Admittedly, the challenge levels do raise the further you progress, but after a cumbersome start that teeters on coma-inducing, it's hard to summon the motivation to keep breathing, let alone to play long enough to get to the later levels. Throw in the ten quid asking-price and it's easy to see why it's hard for me to recommend *Retro Records* anymore than I would a Mr Blobby comeback single.

PCZONE
41

PCZONE TOP 5 INDIE GAMES



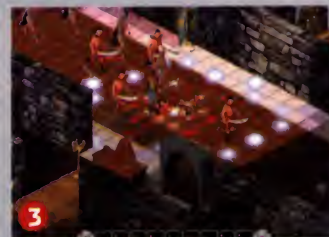
ROBOBLITZ
www.roboblitz.com
Reviewed Issue 177

This stunning third-person action puzzler about a robot trying to defend a space cannon from attacking pirates is the highest scoring Indie Zone game we've ever had. Packed full of physics-based puzzles, excellent combat and jaw-dropping visuals thanks to Unreal Engine 3, you simply can't allow yourself to ignore this gem.



NAKED WAR
www.zee-3.com | Reviewed Issue 177

A highly addictive and visually bold turn-based strategy game played via email in which your team of four soldiers must kill off the opposition with guile, tactics and some serious firepower.



MORNING'S WRATH
www.morningswrath.com | Reviewed Issue 163

A superbly written, beautifully crafted isometric RPG that leads you on an epic adventure to save your land from destruction. A must-buy for any self-respecting RPG fan.



NEW STAR SOCCER 3
www.newstarsoccer.com | Reviewed Issue 164

This novel take on the beautiful game melds *Sensible Soccer* with *Football Manager* and *Goal* (the film) to provide the most complete indie gaming footy experience available.



MR ROBOT
www.moonpod.com | Reviewed Issue 181

Like an isometric *Roboblitz* with zany RPG-style combat, you play a robot who must bring a malfunctioning starship back online. Packed with puzzles, great characters and humour.

BUDGET

It's cars, cocktails, conversation and corpses this month....

**BUDGET
GAME
OF THE
MONTH**

TOCA RACE DRIVER 3

PUBLISHER Mastertronic WEBSITE www.mastertronic.com PRICE £9.99

IF, AS A child, you ever sat in one of those coin-operated cars situated by the exit at supermarkets shouting, "Mummy, I want to be a racing driver!", then *TRD3* should be right up your street.

Neatly cramming in the impressive stats of a massive 35 different types of motorsport, 70 licensed cars and 80 licensed tracks, there's a driving discipline to suit everyone, from Formula One cars through Group B rally cars to monster trucks and a whole lot in between.

With handling that straddles the arcade racer/hardcore sim divide, *TRD3* should prove easy enough for pretty much anyone to take the wheel. If not, at least you'll get to see the Terminal Damage engine in full effect. Allowing for visually spectacular crashes, this also means you'll suffer from mechanical failures too, so be careful on track. For this price though, it's a steal, giving you seven cars to the pound. Now that's a cheap runabout.

Suzy Wallace

**PCZONE
80**



Big wheels.



Blue sky.



Hot stripes.



The road's *that* way.



There are 80 licensed tracks to race on.

JUST CAUSE

PUBLISHER Steam WEBSITE www.steampowered.com PRICE \$29.95 (£15)

SUN, SEA AND 'splosions (OK, we're pushing it now) all combine into one wicked cocktail in Eidos's crazy Central American genre-spanner; think *GTA* gameplay set on a series of tropical *Far Cry*-style islands.

Starting off on the right foot (chucking you out of a plane at 5,000ft), you'll be responsible for taking down the corrupt government. Or at least, that's the plan. But as soon as you get the grapple gun, you'll probably just find yourself running about, latching onto vehicles and being taken for impromptu tours of the island. There's no shortage of machinery to aim at either, from helicopters to jet-skis, and going up to 10,000ft just to freefall and admire the gorgeous scenery is considered a valid past-time.

After a while, the side-tasks of liberating towns become repetitive, but while the game's not big on realism (you can hang, one-handed, from the tail of a jet plane), it's still sun-soaked fun.

Suzy Wallace

**PCZONE
78**



"It's not a bikini top, it's a bra!"

**THIS
MONTH
PCZONE
SAVED MONEY BY...**

Clare being lent a car and so not having to hire one:
Saving: £100

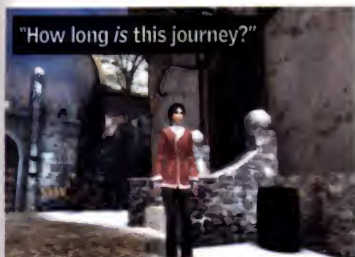


Suzy, Steve and Log not crashing at go-karting:
Saving: Millions in personal liability claims



Kevin & friend using mate's pass on the London Eye:
Saving: £26





DREAMFALL: THE LONGEST JOURNEY

PUBLISHER Xplosiv WEBSITE www.xplosiv.net PRICE £9.99

ALTHOUGH ADVENTURE GAMES remain unfashionable, there are still titles in the ancient genre worth playing. *Fahrenheit*, for example, was a superb, tightly-plotted adult thriller and *Sam & Max's* latest escapades show you can reach the heights of those early '90s LucasArts classics.

Dreamfall: The Longest Journey is a sci-fi action-adventure sequel, although

you don't need to have played *The Longest Journey* (yes, the first game had a very similar name) to enjoy it. With a complex story, three playable characters and a large supporting cast – including a purple robot monkey called Wonkers – *Dreamfall* is a huge and original adventure with a great atmosphere and fantastic soundtrack.

Graphically, it ranges from good to

inept, some of the dialogue is clunky and overwritten and the decent varied reality-switching destinations are peppered with awful combat sections. However, if you prefer your *Myst* to your *Doom* (yes, they do exist), you could do a lot worse than picking up this enthralling conversation 'em up.

Jamie Sefton

PCZONE
70

STUBBS THE ZOMBIE IN REBEL WITHOUT A PULSE

PUBLISHER Steam WEBSITE www.steampowered.com PRICE \$19.95 (£10)

A GAME THAT lags behind its premise like entrails from members of its limited zombie hordes, *Stubbs* nails the ambience of a 1950s city-of-the-future-gone-wrong. It's also gently amusing and boasts one of the finest modern gaming soundtracks going.

Sadly though, all this is undermined by the simple fact that the game's mechanics just don't work. Nibbling brains, throwing guts, controlling armed policemen with a handy *Addams Family* 'thing'-style hand attached to their heads and doing death farts – it sounds fun, but simply isn't.

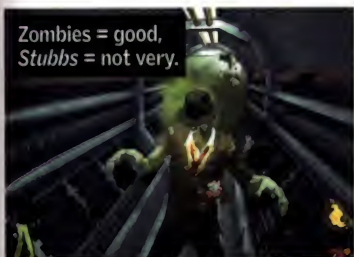
Locked into the engine limitations inherent in a game aimed squarely at Xbox release, any love and optimism banded around during its development must have been as dead as the eponymous hero come the day of release.

Will Porter

PCZONE
57



Zombies = good,
Stubbs = not very.



And the rest...

Old games + cheap prices = budget heaven (or hell)



RISE OF NATIONS: THRONES & PATRIOTS

£9.99, XPLOSIIV

An expansive addition to *RON*, this adds the concept of government to the usual imperial proceedings. However, *Rise Of Nation's* heyday has, well, risen and fallen, and with new contenders on the market, it now feels pretty dated.

PCZONE
69



FACES OF WAR

£9.99, Mastertronic

A detailed and well built (if rather by-the-numbers) RTS, this will appeal strictly to the hardcore. Fans of the original *Soldiers* will feel at home, if a little underwhelmed, but at this price, WWII RTS connoisseurs should take a chance.

PCZONE
68



TOP SPIN 2

\$19.95 (£10), STEAM

Not quite as good as *Virtua Tennis 3* but still a solid contender (unlike *Henman*), this price drop will ensure it capitalises on the inevitable tennis craze post-Wimbledon. Doesn't serve up an ace, but good fun in multiplayer nonetheless.

PCZONE
72

PCZONE TOP 5 BUDGET BUYS



1

FAR CRY

£9.99, MASTERTRONIC

Better than *HL2*? So some say. The best non-gravity gun shooter of recent years anyway. An island paradise with extra explosions and terrific enemy AI.



2

THE ELDER SCROLLS III: MORROWIND

£4.99, MASTERTRONIC

Bethesda's classic free-roaming RPG now offers the cheapest goblin-bashing around. Essential stuff.



3

THE MOVIES

£9.99, ACTIVISION 'BEST OF' RANGE

A great movie-studio management title that transcends the genre by also offering a raft of brilliant film-making tools. Home-made machinima ahoy!



ROME: TOTAL WAR

£9.99, GSP WHITE LABEL

A long-term chart-topper, *Rome: TW's* glorious real-time battles feature thousands of units hacking each other to bits. A bloody must-buy.



PSYCHONAUTS

\$19.95 (£9.99), STEAM

Brilliant humour, creative level design and a range of psychic powers propel this title into the stratosphere of platformers.

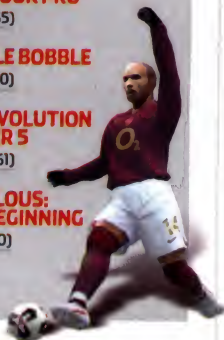
BUYER'S GUIDE



The bestest games your money can buy...

PCZONE TOP 5 GAMES BEGINNING WITH 'P'

- 1 PRIVATEER 2: THE DARKENING (ISSUE 44)
- 2 PGA TOUR PRO (ISSUE 55)
- 3 PUZZLE BOBBLE (ISSUE 50)
- 4 PRO EVOLUTION SOCCER 5 (ISSUE 161)
- 5 POPULOUS: THE BEGINNING (ISSUE 70)



PCZONE TOP 5 BEST GAME ENDINGS

- 1 FULL THROTTLE (ISSUE 27)
- 2 STARCRAFT (ISSUE 64)
- 3 HITMAN: BLOOD MONEY (ISSUE 169)
- 4 PRINCE OF PERSIA: THE SANDS OF TIME (ISSUE 136)
- 5 MAFIA (ISSUE 119)



PCZONE TOP 5 CRAP GAME ENDINGS

- 1 TOMB RAIDER: LEGEND (ISSUE 168)
- 2 FAHRENHEIT (ISSUE 159)
- 3 MEDAL OF HONOR: ALLIED ASSAULT (ISSUE 112)
- 4 KOTOR II: THE SITH LORDS (ISSUE 153)
- 5 FABLE: THE LOST CHAPTERS (ISSUE 160)



Shooters

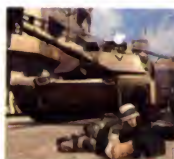
Must buy!



HALF-LIFE 2

PCZ Issue: 148 - 97%

Everyone knew this would be good, but no-one quite expected the tour de force that Valve managed to pull off. Easily a contender for the best game of all time, *Half-Life 2* is just one stunning set-piece after another, and is guaranteed to leave you dribbling with awe. Be warned though, a (fast) online connection is needed for Valve's mandatory Steam delivery service.



BATTLEFIELD 2

PCZ Issue: 157 - 94%

If it's online action you want, look no further. *BF2* sets the gold standard for team-based shooting, with huge 64-player maps, squad and commander modes and the best graphics ever. Just make sure you have a ninja PC.



BUDGET

FAR CRY

PCZ Issue: 140 - 93%

In many eyes, Crytek's shooter outweighs even the mighty *Half-Life 2* in its tension, tactics and expansive level design. It's a mighty achievement with seemingly freeform action and the best sniping money can buy.



HL2: EPISODE ONE

PCZ Issue: 170 - 91%

Suffering slightly from thematic overlap from *HL2*, *Ep One* nevertheless contains the greatest moments from the entire *HL* series. Warm, funny and thrilling, it may be short, but the first five minutes are worth the entry fee alone.



CALL OF DUTY 2

PCZ Issue: 162 - 91%

Brutal, relentless and totally gripping, the WWII shooter sequel packs more action into a single level than most pack into an entire game. Epic scale battles and intense drama. World War II at its unforgiving best.



F.E.A.R.

PCZ Issue: 160 - 90%

With more shocks and scares than an episode of *Revenge* (and a much higher body count), *F.E.A.R.* pushes the shooter part of FPS to the limit. It might not be the scariest game ever, but it will make you jump.



STALKER: SHADOW OF CHERNOBYL

PCZ Issue: 179 - 85%

Despite being a bit on the late side, *STALKER* remains a fantastic outing for PC shooters with its unique setting, great action and genuine attempt to do something new.

Strategy

Must buy!



COMPANY OF HEROES

PCZ Issue: 173 - 93%

The fact that *Company Of Heroes* has knocked *Rome: Total War* from its strategy throne is testament enough to how utterly refined and slick it is. Relic have taken the best bits from strategy games and stripped out the crap, leaving you with a game that's fun, intelligent, accessible, taxing, tactical and exciting. And with that many positive words in one sentence, you know it must be good. Essential.



CIVILIZATION IV

PCZ Issue: 162 - 92%

A Buyer's Guide without a *Civ* game would be a sorry, sorry place, and luckily the latest version does the business with aplomb. Violent Buddhist Romans take over the world.



MEDIEVAL II: TOTAL WAR

PCZ Issue: 175 - 91%

A blend of maniacal plotting on the strategic map and whooping with delight as your many warriors spectacularly collide head-on with your opponents' armies. History was never this much fun at school.



RISE OF NATIONS:

RISE OF LEGENDS

PCZ Issue: 168 - 91%

Takes the great gameplay of *RON*, improves on it with elements from *Civ IV* and *Total War* and wraps the whole lot in a gorgeous sci-fi setting. An RTS bursting with innovation and imagination.



LOTR: THE BATTLE FOR MIDDLE-EARTH

PCZ Issue: 149 - 91%

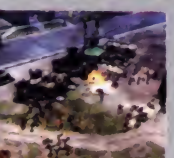
Although the *LOTR* RTS doesn't hold a candle to the *Total War* franchise, there's nothing quite like ordering a Balrog around for guaranteed strategy fun.



SUPREME COMMANDER

PCZ Issue: 179 - 88%

Massive battles and huge armies comprising of thousands of air, sea and land units? Tick. Giant stormy robots and a superb tactical map? Tick. One of the most unique RTS titles around? Tick.



C&C3: TIBERIUM WARS

PCZ Issue: 180 - 86%

A modern-day rehash of the old-school *Command & Conquer* formula we all know and love, but with polished visuals, the triumphant return of the FMV and an excellent new faction. A play is most certainly in order.

Action/Adventure

Must buy!



MAX PAYNE 2: THE FALL OF MAX PAYNE

PCZ Issue: 136 - 93%

The chosen poison for certain PCZ staffers after a long hard day, Payne's second outing is perhaps the most pixel-perfect example of joy-through-excessive-destruction on the market. Slicker than slick, breathtaking and quite beautiful, *Max Payne 2* provides the greatest gaming kicks that money can buy. It's extremely short, but so tense, well designed and replayable that you just won't care.



GRAND THEFT AUTO: SAN ANDREAS

PCZ Issue: 155 - 92%

To think that the simple top-down car game has turned into this - a work of creative genius. Violent, brutal, smutty, freeform and hilarious - *San Andreas* is the summit of gaming achievement.



BUDGET

SPLINTER CELL: CHAOS THEORY

PCZ Issue: 154 - 91%

A tour de force from Ubisoft, *Splinter Cell* format and runs with it in solo, co-op and the now well-established spies vs mercenaries multiplayer. Smooth, lithe and good with a knife.



FAHRENHEIT

PCZ Issue: 159 - 90%

Murder most foul, with you as the killer. This twisting, turning, brilliantly-told plot features multiple character control, split-screen tension, branching scenes and several endings. From the brains behind *The Nomad Soul*.



BUDGET

PSYCHONAUTS

PCZ Issue: 156 - 90%

Clever, witty, impeccably detailed and absolutely off its rocker - *Psychonauts* is proof that the anarchic edge of LucasArts hasn't completely left us. A slightly flawed game in some respects, but still a dazzling feat.



BUDGET

BEYOND GOOD & EVIL

PCZ Issue: 138 - 89%

We heap praise on this game on a monthly basis, but it's for a reason. Michel Ancel's superb journey through the strange land of Hillys is nothing short of storytelling magic. It's cheap now, so go out and buy it.



PRINCE OF PERSIA: THE TWO THRONES

PCZ Issue: 164 - 86%

The shirtless wonder finally makes it into the Buyer's Guide. Not that any of his outings can be considered bad games, but *TTT* manages to get all the ingredients just right this time around.

MMOs

Must buy!



WORLD OF WARCRAFT

PCZ Issue: 152 - 95%
Blizzard's recreation of the classic strategy world in MMO form doesn't disappoint. Beautiful to look at, absorbing to play and with more content than you can shake a magic stick at.



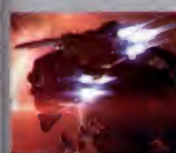
EVERQUEST II

PCZ Issue: 150 - 95%
A *Star Trek* to *WOW*'s *Star Wars*, *EQII* gives the original a much needed lick of paint, a whole new world to play in and a greater sense of depth and immersion. A time-sink in the true, classic sense.



GUILD WARS

PCZ Issue: 156 - 94%
How to make a gaming genre accessible to the masses. It shines with polish, thought and lack of monthly subscription fees. Newbies can feel at home too, thanks to a totally skills-based set-up.



EVE ONLINE

PCZ Issue: 130 - 88%
Elite online has been a long-held fantasy and this space sim is the closest yet to making it a reality. Its slow pace belies the options on offer, from mining or trading to piracy - it's up to you.



LOTR ONLINE

PCZ Issue: 182 - 87%
A near-perfect representation of Tolkien's stories, with solid combat and engaging plots, all bound up in a tasty MMO bundle. Meet Gandalf! Play as a hobbit or a spider! The whole of Middle-earth awaits...

Simulation

Must buy!



X3: REUNION

PCZ Issue: 162 - 92%
Finally, a space sim to better *X2: The Threat*, and it just happens to be the sequel. Possibly the best-looking game ever to appear on a PC. Plus, it plays well too.



IL-2 STURMOVIK: FORGOTTEN BATTLES

PCZ Issue: 128 - 92%
While flight sims are becoming rarer and rarer, at least the quality remains high. None more so than this ultra-classy WWII combat sim. Chocks away, comrade!



MICROSOFT FLIGHT SIMULATOR X

PCZ Issue: 175 - 89%
This latest iteration in the *Flight Sim* series is the biggest since they started using actual polygons. What's more, the visuals may just sear your eyeballs.



FREELANCER

PCZ Issue: 128 - 84%
If *X2* is too slow for you, *Freelancer* should fit the bill. Plenty of trading, bounty-hunting and space piracy, but with the emphasis on action rather than realism. Space has never been this much fun.



SILENT HUNTER 4: WOLVES OF THE PACIFIC

PCZ Issue: 181 - 82%
If a life beneath the waves tickles your fancy, then this submarine simulator fits the bill. Tactics, torpedos, sonar and sailors combine to make the ultimate ship sinker.

Driving/Racing

Must buy!



GTR2

PCZ Issue: 173 - 92%
Can't afford a Ferrari? Then pick up this scarily realistic driving sim and race the car of your dreams, complete with an improved driving model, new modes and many other improvements.



GT LEGENDS

PCZ Issue: 161 - 92%
While *GTR* takes care of modern-day racing, *GT Legends* does the business for historical driving. A natural successor to *Grand Prix Legends*, it's like the swinging '60s never ended.



LIVE FOR SPEED

PCZ Issue: 158 - 90%
Online racing at its best. Realistic handling, hilarious crashes and a racing community second to none. On the right servers that is. A remarkable achievement by such a small team.



COLIN MCRAC: DIRT

PCZ Issue: 183 - 88%
The rallying legend returns and this time he's joined by a host of other off-road events, an excitable Travis Pastrana and some of the best-looking graphics to grace any driving game on PC so far.



NEED FOR SPEED: MOST WANTED

PCZ Issue: 163 - 88%
Thrill-packed racer from EA, this time with the emphasis on high-speed police chases and notoriety factors. You can still make like Westwood with the car pimping though.

God games

Must buy!



THE MOVIES

PCZ Issue: 162 - 95%
Life as a movie mogul, games don't get better than this. Not only a god/management game par excellence, but also a complete home movie-making kit. Brilliant.



BLACK & WHITE 2

PCZ Issue: 161 - 93%
The original split opinion, and this sequel does the same. We love it though, and think it's erased all the problems as well as adding plenty of new options to boot. It's gorgeous too.



GARRY'S MOD

PCZ Issue: 179 - 88%
While it might not strictly be a god game, *Garry's Mod* gives you the tools to create almost anything you can think of in the Source Engine, from functional robots to saucy ragdoll jpegs. Try it out and see for yourself.



EVIL GENIUS

PCZ Issue: 147 - 84%
Ever wanted to say 'No Mr Bond, I expect you to die', or create giant evil lairs inside hollow volcanoes? Well now you can with this great megalomaniac sim. It's always fun being bad.



VEGAS: MAKE IT BIG

PCZ Issue: 135 - 84%
An in-depth tycoon game with all the 3D graphical glitz and glamour of Vegas itself. Provide hotels, casinos and over-priced magic shows that suck the money out of the punters.

Sport

Must buy!



FOOTBALL MANAGER 2007

PCZ Issue: 175 - 90%
Still reigning supreme as one of the most popular ways to fritter away the hours, the latest edition of *FM* has tons of improvements. The best footy management title.



PRO EVOLUTION SOCCER 6

PCZ Issue: 175 - 88%
Konami's arcade kickabout is the best yet, with improved AI, fantastic animation and enhanced multiplayer. Not the Xbox 360 version, but still better than *FIFA* - just.



TIGER WOODS PGA TOUR 2006

PCZ Issue: 161 - 85%
Not the most recent version but still our favourite, *Tiger 2006* has you time-travelling as Mr Woods. The best PC golf game yet, mainly thanks to the two career modes.



FIFA 07

PCZ Issue: 174 - 84%
EA's come up trumps with the latest *FIFA*. PES-style controls, great ball physics and a decent management option combine with EA's usual top presentation to make this the best *FIFA* yet.



NHL 06

PCZ Issue: 160 - 84%
Ice hockey may not be the UK's number-one sporting pastime, but that doesn't make this *06* incarnation of it any less fun. Exciting, breathless and violent ball-out fun for the whole family.

Role-playing games

Must buy!



THE ELDER SCROLLS IV: OBLIVION

PCZ Issue: 167 - 95%
Oblivion's sublime graphics, intuitive character-creation and massive freeform gameplay put paid to the myth that you have to own a beard to enjoy RPGs.



KNIGHTS OF THE OLD REPUBLIC

PCZ Issue: 137 - 94%
KOTOR is the best *Star Wars* game of recent years. Moving, dramatic and fairly adult in tone, it also has a hefty dose of lightsabers to keep you happy.



THE ELDER SCROLLS III: MORROWIND

PCZ Issue: 116 - 94%
Possibly the most intimidating, yet wonderful game we've played - the breadth and depth of *Morrowind* remains a remarkable achievement.



DEUS EX

PCZ Issue: 93 - 94%
This remains the benchmark in FPS RPGs. Twisting sci-fi plots, exciting freeform levels and some moments of pure exhilaration and drama help retain *Deus Ex* as the alpha male of the gaming world.



NEVERWINTER NIGHTS 2

PCZ Issue: 176 - 86%
An identical twin to *NWN* but using modern technology, *NWN2* has all the gleeful D&D levelling we love, plus tons of modding opportunities. If you have a beard, this is for you.

INCOMING!

All approximate monthly dates are correct at the time of going to press

Q3

ASSASSIN'S CREED
BIOSHOCK
BLACKSITE: AREA 51
CALL OF DUTY 4: MODERN WARFARE
CIVILIZATION IV: BEYOND THE SWORD
CLIVE BARKER'S JERICHO
COMPANY OF HEROES: OPPOSING FRONTS
CRYSIS
ELVEON
EMPIRE EARTH III
FRONTLINES: FUEL OF WAR
GUILD WARS: EYE OF THE NORTH
HELLGATE: LONDON
KANE & LYNCH: DEAD MEN
LEFT 4 DEAD
MEDAL OF HONOR: AIRBORNE
MEDIEVAL II: TOTAL WAR KINGDOMS
MOTOGP 07
NEED FOR SPEED: PROSTREET
NEVERWINTER NIGHTS 2: MASK OF THE BETRAYER
OBSCURE II
PHANTASY STAR UNIVERSE: AMBITION OF THE ILLUMINUS
ROGUE WARRIOR
SENSIBLE WORLD OF SOCCER
SPEEDBALL 2
STRANGLEHOLD
THE WITCHER
TIMESHIFT
UNIVERSE AT WAR: EARTH ASSAULT
WORLD IN CONFLICT

UBISOFT
2K GAMES
MIDWAY
ACTIVISION
2K GAMES
CODEMASTERS
THQ
EA
TBA
VIVENDI GAMES
THQ
NCSOFT
EA
EIDOS
VALVE
EA
SEGA
THQ
EA
ATARI
PLAYLOGIC
SEGA
TBA
CODEMASTERS
FROGSTER INTERACTIVE
MIDWAY
ATARI
VIVENDI GAMES
SEGA
VIVENDI GAMES

A close-up, high-contrast image of a large, metallic, greenish-grey robot head from the game Fallout 3. The robot has multiple eyes and a complex mechanical structure.

**AUGUST
ISSUE
ON SALE
NOW!**

FALLOUT 3

**IN-DEPTH SCOOP ON
THE NEXT GREAT RPG**

21 **NEW REVIEWS**
Lost Planet, Shadowrun,
GRAV 2, Driver, Two Worlds

PC GAMER

BRITAIN'S BEST-SELLING PC GAMES MAGAZINE

The BioShock logo, featuring the word "BIOSHOCK" in a stylized, metallic font with a city skyline silhouette below it.


BIOSHOCK

**WORLD EXCLUSIVE
REVIEW!**

PLUS

- OUR TOP 100 GAMES REVEALED
- FAR CRY 2 EXCLUSIVE FIRST LOOK

Visit www.pcgamer.co.uk for more!

A close-up image of a BioShock robot, specifically a Spliceman, with a glowing yellow eye and a menacing expression.

**SEPTEMBER
ISSUE
ON SALE
AUG 2!**



PCZONE

HARDWARE

Better gaming through technology

Mr Happy

BY NOW, I'M guessing if you're still reading this column, you're in one of two groups. The first find my hostility towards Windows somewhat reassuring; the second scoff at my adversarial approach and fail to see how someone so cynical is paid good money to head up the hardware section.

Well, this week I have good news for everyone. The second group will be pleased to know I've spent genuine Wandy pounds on a Squeezebox – the Logitech-branded music player that allows you to access your choons from any room in the house. It works by streaming data wirelessly from a SlimServer program that runs on your PC as a background service, and it works flawlessly. You can even configure it to broadcast free internet stations, including Pandora from pandora.com – a radio idea so dazzlingly good that I had to take it with me to bed. Which I now do.

The first group will be delighted to hear that I replaced the HUMAX 9200T PVR in my lounge – a dedicated digital TV recorder that has worked splendidly since purchased last year – with an Acer Idea 510 Windows Media Center PC. I convinced Mrs Wandy this was a good idea by saying that MCE was a 'step up' for us, and to prove it I fired up one of the included girly games, which threw a nasty-looking driver error and asked us to reboot the PC. I love technology. But only the stuff that works.

Phil Wand, hardware editor

HD IN A BOX

New Shuttle the first small machine to feature HDMI port



SHUTTLE'S NEW SG33G5 has support for all our favourite Duos, Quads, plus Pentium Dual-Core E2000s and Celeron 400s. It also has Gigabit LAN, x16 PCI-Express, five SATA ports, six USB holes and 7.1 audio on offer – but at a retail price of £200, it ain't especially cheap.

Still, the company is touting its new high-def-friendly cube to AV owners, people not normally known for their tightfistedness. Add the requisite HD DVD or Blu-Ray drive – the

cheapest of which remain around the £500 mark – plus 500GB or more hard disk space, Vista Home Premium and the 2GB RAM necessary to make it run smoothly, and you'll have pushed the cost some way past £1,500.

Shuttle do promise owners they'll be able to play 3D games, which seems a bit of a stretch – the SG33G5 has integrated Intel GMA3100 graphics, a technology that has proven itself to be of little use for anything more punishing than a YouTube clip. You can, of course, slot in a new Radeon or GeForce, but your choice is going to be restricted somewhat by the 250W power supply. Anyone for *Tetris*? www.shuttle.eu

Plays Blu-Rays and HD DVDs.
Assuming you have any.

PHENOM FOR FIREWORKS

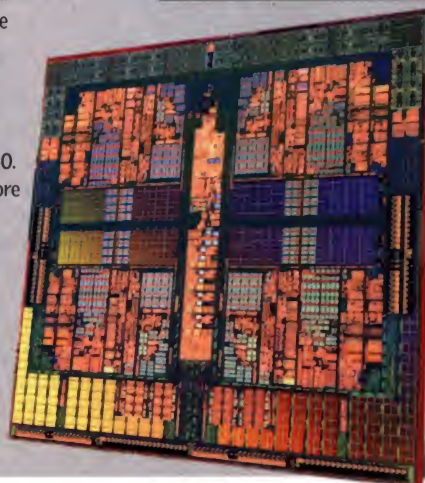
New AM3 chips likely for November

THE PHENOM – AMD'S new high-end processor line – should show up in November of this year. So say the manufacturers lined up to make the motherboards for the chips.

A total of four new products should make it onto shelves: two Phenom X4s, an X2 and the FX-80. These should be followed by a more complete range in early 2008.

The processors bear Intel-like naming, with a similarly bizarre arrangement of numbers designed to show 'benefit' rather than power, the only effect of which is to confuse people. Good job boys. www.amd.com

Monopoly for techno-geeks.



NEWS ROUND-UP

Rumours are flying that Vista owners won't be seeing their first Service Pack until some time next year. While this could be bad news for Microsoft – the majority of its corporate customers are prone to delaying Windows rollouts until after SP1 – it could be good news for the rest of us still working round the bugs in the current code. microsoft.com

From September this year, BenQ will be known as Qisda, which is a stupid word reminiscent of a certain supermarket, and is apparently an acronym for 'quality, innovation, speed, driving and achievements'. We prefer 'questionable identity for sixpenny displays and accessories', but just don't see them running with it. benq.com

WARNING:
THIS MONTH'S
HARD WORDS

BY STEVE HOGARTY

Vista Home Premium: Contains most of the features of the Vista Home Deluxe Super Edition, but none of the Ultimate Bravo Scream Edition features. **Svchost.exe:** This is a virus. If you see it running, you should turn off your PC immediately and call the police. **Windows Update Agent:** A man in a suit who pilots a Blackhawk helicopter and peeks in your window at night to make sure XP is up to date. If not, he gets angry. **939-pin AMD:** A chip on which every last pin must be counted and recounted by the hard-working quality assurance staff at AMD.

GOOD DEAL

The custom system you see here has a E6700 processor running at 3.0GHz, 2GB RAM, 0.5TB drive space, two Radeon HD 2900 XTs and an X-Fi Xtreme Audio card hanging off an ASUS P5W-DH motherboard. It comes with Vista Home Premium Edition, the most sensible choice for gamers.

Build quality is first-rate too. CyberPower warrant their systems for three years, and in addition offer a no-quibble DOA return or refund policy, plus a 30-day guarantee of your money back if you're not happy. These are just the sort of things you need to take onboard when making your purchase, as no two companies are alike.



GAMER INFINITY XFIRE GT FAMILY

PRICE £1,399 MANUFACTURER CyberPower WEBSITE cyberpowersystem.co.uk

MY DELL WORKSTATION has more dents and scratches than a gypsy's Transit, so it's a good job the case is made from a hard-wearing American material called 'thick-ass plastic'. Being a tower, it spends its entire life on the floor sucking up dirt, being kicked and having fat people roll their chairs into it. So it needs to be tough.

I'm telling you this because the Aplus XCLIO case – which, incidentally, caught the attention of Mrs Wandy, who never normally notices such things – is rather unmanly at shrugging off everyday abuse. That huge gob at the front is covered by a metal lattice which, if deformed even slightly, fouls the 250mm propeller immediately behind it. I spent half an hour attacking it with

screwdrivers in an effort to remove a dent I'd made just heaving it out of the box. No idea how long it'll last down by your feet or bouncing between suspension turrets in the boot of your car.

Still, the XCLIO does draw admiring glances from the ladies, and is also silent – at least, it may as well be silent, because whatever noise it makes is drowned out by the fighter-jet roar of two new Radeons flying in CrossFire formation.

SPEAK UP

Now the HD 2900 XT isn't a quiet card, and two of them singing in unison is quite a distraction. It's not something you'd notice in the middle of *Battlefield 2142*, where noise only adds to the ambience, but if you're up late tinkering with 3ivx settings, other people in the house are likely to adopt

a broad Scottish accent and shout at you. Trust me on this.

On the bright side, you do get some astonishingly good benchmark scores. The *Supreme Commander* result is out front of every other system we've had here, with the added benefit of not crashing every 20 minutes – something NVIDIA owners have had to put up with for some time now. Sadly, the Vista Experience, 3DMark and PCMark scores are missing from the test as the system was running uncertified drivers. In their place, the *Call Of Juarez* result for 1280x1024 pushed past 30fps, which while pathetic – all DX10 scores remain a joke – was still the smoothest I've seen it.

Two flagship ATI cards working in tandem may seem like your gateway to tomorrow's realism, but the fact remains that you'll probably spend your time using

the system to revitalise yesterday's games by running everything on maximum and still getting past 200fps. And to rate it based on that criteria, it's a fantastic toy.

BENCHMARKS

Supreme Commander	17,226
Counter-Strike: Source	263.53 fps
Call Of Juarez	32fps

PCZONE
87

FUSION HARDCORE

PRICE £1,650 MANUFACTURER Chillblast WEBSITE chillblast.co.uk

CHILLBLAST'S £1,100 FUSION Hydra won our Vista PC round-up a few months back, and what you see here is the result of spending half as much again.

The Fusion HardCore has Intel's quad-core QX6700 engine, a Vista-friendly 4GB RAM, 1TB of hard drive space together with a GeForce GTX and the best case Lian Li have ever made. Like the Fusion Hydra it's quieter than a church mouse – if you have a rusting three-gig Prescott under your hood, you'll be astonished at how little fuss the system makes – and it'll make mincemeat of everything you own. All those detail sliders you were forced to nudge towards 'minimum' can now be set to 'maximum'. It's a great feeling.

And while the QX6700/GTX combo produces benchmark results similar to the Fusion Hydra, the system never feels stressed – hungry apps like Photoshop, Vegas and Vue d'Esprit just breeze along. You half expect to roll the case backwards – it rides on solid aluminium wheels – and find a giant reefer stuck into one of the

USB sockets. Even the 3DMark06 leviathan looks like it's swimming rather than dematerialising and materialising at 50m intervals.

On paper the QX6700 seems only marginally quicker than a clocked-to-hell E6600, but the reality is that it's a plainly superior engine for your PC. That's where your money goes.

BENCHMARKS

Supreme Commander	17,033
Counter-Strike: Source	264.59 fps
3DMark06	11,818
PCMark05	N/A
Vista Experience Index	5.9

PCZONE
87



GEFORCE 8800 ULTRA XXX

PRICE £430 MANUFACTURER XFX WEBSITE xfxforce.co.uk



THE 8800 ULTRA is a lesson in patience, because when it was released just a couple of months ago, it was £100 more than the GTX.

And it really wasn't worth it. The Ultra is a GTX on steroids, and as such can offer no more than a 10% gain in bottom-end power – not enough to warrant the extra outlay. But price drops have meant that there's now less than £50 separating them. It almost makes sense.

Yes, digging a little deeper gives you bragging rights to the fastest card on sale, and something you can rest assured will make mincemeat of your existing DX9 games – assuming you have a Core 2 behind it – while at the same time offering you a

chance to play DX10 titles with some degree of fluidity. Just don't go rushing out to upgrade if you're already using a GTS or GTX.

PCZONE
85

RECLUSA

PRICE £33 MANUFACTURER Microsoft WEBSITE microsoft.com/hardware



GIVEN THAT GAMERS are often stereotyped as reclusive losers, 'Reclusa' is a dumb name for a gaming product.

Like the Habu mouse, it's a handsome device resulting from Microsoft's design partnership with Razer. The Reclusa successfully pulls off looking both bling and purposeful, with blue backlighting plus a scattering of hotkeys and cheap-feeling jog wheels.

It has the world's most comfortable wrist pad and enough weight to make it handy when LAN parties go bad. It's also the only keyboard I know that has stowage for the entire cable, and the only one with gold-plated USB connectors. Which are, of course, pure gimmickry.

The keys have a damped but positive action, though the shift keys and space bar are alarmingly noisy. It's a top choice for games, and the Razer software works really well. It'd be nice to define longer macros and be able to turn out the backlight, but otherwise it's superb.

PCZONE
90

HOW TO... LEARN TO LOVE WINDOWS VISTA

Need:

A good-natured tolerance and a copy of Windows Vista

Time:

Ongoing

Difficulty level:



Phil Wand

Deep Blue

Medium doofus

Big Brother contestant

Janie Sefton

Still not sure about moving Windows? *Phil Wand* shows you how to make Vista seem like home again...

TURN UP AT Vista's desktop for the first time and you'd be forgiven for thinking that not much has changed. Key elements from all prior versions of Windows are here, so there's still a taskbar, a system tray area on the right and a Start Menu on the left.

But Vista's downfall is the way it jumbles this cosy familiarity with a sense of disarray normally associated with moving house. All your things are suddenly where you least expect them, meaning that the simplest day-to-day

tasks send you running between rooms as though struck with an illness or handicap.

I've been using the new Windows for over a year now, and even today I find myself hunting for a particular system setting or frowning at some overly wordy dialog box, with a look of befuddlement that reminds me of my father staring at the landing carpet, desperately trying to remember why he'd gone upstairs. There are ways to make things feel like home again. Read on to find out what...

01 Start Menu

Click the Start button and you'll see how the menu is still divided in two, with applications on the left and settings on the right. But now your programs no longer cascade over the desktop and are confined to the menu area instead – a big improvement over XP. In addition, integrated search allows you to simply start typing the name of what you want and it'll appear in a list.

So the only changes you need to make here are minor ones. You'll want the Control Panel button cascading out to a menu, and you'll want small icons rather than the special-needs-sized Vista ones. Right-click the taskbar, choose Properties, then select the Start Menu tab. Click the Customise button at the top, choose Display as a menu for Control Panel, then at the bottom deselect Use Large Icons. And if you decide you want to go back to the way Windows 95, 98, Me and 2000 organised things, choose Classic Start Menu instead.

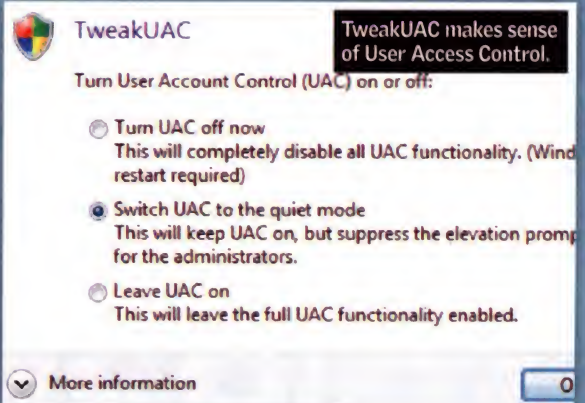


UAC does not protect your system. It's there to provide an extra confirmation step between you and an irreversible change to your system. **TweakUAC** can be downloaded free from tweak-uac.com, and works by removing the confirmation step for administrator accounts. **VistaBootPRO** from vistabootpro.org is another superb free tool. It allows you to edit your boot configuration entries from inside any version of Windows, but without any need for specialised knowledge. Installing multiple operating systems on your PC is a tricky business and this simplifies matters considerably. **Directory Opus** is a must if you're a software coder or game modder and work inside multiple directories. It's essentially a **tabbed Windows Explorer replacement**, with so many useful features it'd take a month to type them out. Worth every penny.

02 User Access Control

User Account Control or UAC is much-debated, as it seems to do nothing but impede your progress when making small changes to your system. UAC works by asking the permission of an administrator before allowing those changes, be they installing apps, updating drivers or deleting files. It's a great idea, in that stupid users and viruses will have a much harder job of screwing up your PC, but it's intrusive and most people turn it off anyway.

A better approach is to install **TweakUAC**. This freeware utility adds a much-needed 'quiet mode' for admins, meaning only users without sufficient privileges will be prompted when trying to make changes. It's a godsend.



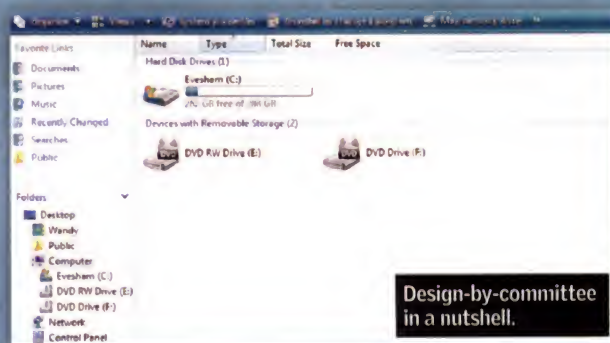
03 Windows Explorer

What Microsoft have done with Explorer is ingenious. It's now really untidy, and has numerous silly ideas like the Favorite Places panel which appears exactly where you'd expect your folders to be.

The easy answer here is to drag the panel's bottom edge to hide it, then right-click the Details Pane at the bottom and hide that too. Tap Alt to display the menus, click Tools,

Options, and select Classic View. Phew.

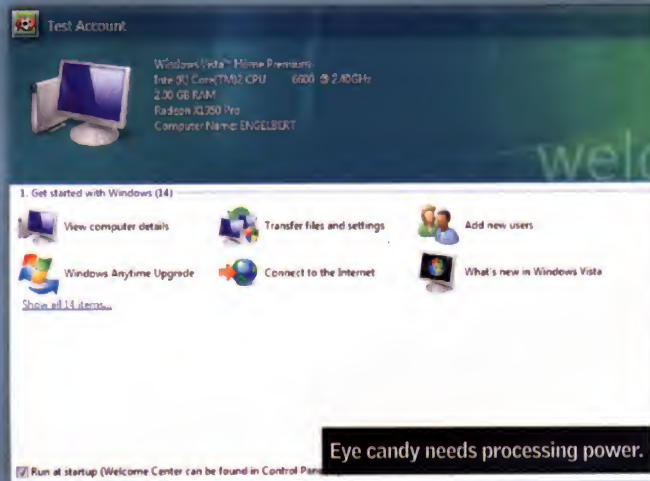
Even with things set back to how they should be, Vista still does its level-best to annoy anyone who's ever used XP. For example, the directory structure has no horizontal scrollbar, making it impossible to work with deeply-nested folders. To get round this you should use Directory Opus – see Dear Wendy, issue 183.



04 Aero

Once you get used to Aero's idiosyncrasies, such as the way certain windows lack menus, or the way the transparent borders distort what lies beneath them, it feels like a premium product. And then you realise that Desktop Window Manager – that's the process which handles the look and feel – is using three times the CPU and ten times the RAM showing you an empty screen.

If you like to eke out top performance from your rig, avoid Aero. To disable it, right-click on your desktop, click Properties, then choose Windows Color and Appearance. You now need to click the Open Classic Appearance link at the bottom and choose Vista Basic from the list.



05 Install Windows XP

Even if you've bought your PC with Vista pre-installed, there's a high chance you'll have a copy of XP on disc somewhere – so why not make use of both operating systems on the one disk? Vista now includes its own partition manager, meaning you can create space for new operating systems from within Windows itself.

In Disk Management, right-click your existing system drive and choose Shrink. Choose a size for the new XP partition, assign a drive letter and format it. You can now reboot, insert your Windows XP CD and install to the new space. With XP loaded, download VistaBootPRO and reinstall the Vista boot loader. Restart and you'll get a menu prompting you to choose between your new and old OSS.



64-bit Listen very carefully, I will say this only once...

Don't buy the 64-bit version of Vista. OK? Just don't. Given that the mainstream 32-bit version is still suffering from missing drivers, drivers that don't work and drivers that look like they work but make everything else wobbly, you'd be a sick fool to try and use a version that, even if it were working smoothly, will give you nothing tangible in return. It's a sad fact that the gaming community has bred this desire to have the more awesome version of everything, together with the belief that 64-bit somehow fits that bill. But it doesn't. Not yet.

QUESTIONS QUESTIONS

Q Is Vista really as bad as you make out?

A XP users currently have no reason to upgrade, and with compatibility issues hitting many best-selling games, it's not something we can recommend. Plus, every one of its most talked-about features can be bolted onto XP anyway.

Q But don't you need Vista for DirectX 10?

A Yes. But games aren't great by whatever version DirectX they employ. Original *Counter-Strike* remains the most popular online shooter and that needs nothing more than DirectX 5.

Q So what Windows are you using?

A XP with Vista machines for testing only. Vista refuses to run games like *Supreme Commander* smoothly, and there's still no driver for Wendy's webcam.

Q Will things get better?

A Without doubt. Recall that XP had serious teething trouble too.



DEAR WANDY

If it ain't broke, don't fix it. If it ain't working, don't panic...



Problems?

We've all got them you know... Remembered your raid date in *WOW*, but not your partner's birthday? Cat mistaken your shoe for the litter tray again? Stubbornly playing *BF2142*, even though you're the only one left on the server? We can't help with those (no, not even the Mighty Wandy), but we can solve all of your hardware hassles. Wandy knows everything and is willing to help if you email him at wandy@dearwandy.com, including as much info as you can and system specs where applicable.

AUTOMATIC HATE

Q I have an issue that I think other readers may be struggling with: it's happening on both my laptop and my desktop, and I've found a whole bunch of forum postings by people with the same issue. Basically, when Automatic Updates is running on my machine, my CPU usage goes up to 100% and stays there, not allowing anything to run and not installing the updates. An *svchost.exe* process starts up and starts swallowing huge amounts of memory, dwarfing everything else on my machine, and absorbing all the resources I have.

It's causing my computer to grind and only when Updates is turned off completely does it stabilise. Even if I set it to not install downloads automatically, it still uses 100% because the function is switched on. If I cancel the *svchost* process, both IE7 and Outlook stop working, but Firefox works fine. My laptop is a Dell Inspiron 1300 and my desktop a home-built Pentium III 1.8GHz.

Any thoughts on how I can stop this from happening? I'm aware that the longer I leave Automatic Updates off, the more open to attack my PC is. I use the laptop for work especially, so any help you can give would be great.

Carl Timms



ROCK AND A HARD PLACE

Q I'm considering buying myself a laptop as the one I have is old and no good for modern games. I'm in the Forces and a laptop is an essential survival tool when travelling or when I go home on leave. I'm looking at either a Rock CTX Pro with T7600 2.33GHz Core 2 Duo, GeForce 7950 Go GTX 512MB, 2GB DDR2 and 160GB HD at £1,848.87 inclusive; or an Alienware Aurora m9700 with ML44 2.4GHz Turion 800MHz, two GeForce Go 7900 GS in SLI, 2GB DDR and 160GB HD

at £2,043.32 inclusive. The money isn't a problem but I'm wondering which you'd recommend. Are there alternatives just as good but cheaper?

Rob Simpson

A You'll find that the ML44 in the Alienware is more than marginally slower than the T7600 in the Rock. Still, if you fancy posing with an Alienware machine tucked under your arm, I'd suggest going for the Intel-based Area-51 m5550 with a T7600 processor, 2GB RAM and WideUXGA 1920x1200 screen. I'd also be inclined to upgrade any 5,400RPM hard drive to a 7,200 unit on whatever machine you eventually buy, and perhaps save some money by going for 80GB instead of 160GB. Spend what you save on a Western Digital USB drive instead.

There's a problem here though. Intel-based Alienware machines all come with graphics hardware that only just cut the mustard a year ago. The Go 7900 GS from the m9700 and the Go 7950 GTX from the mALX – both AMD-based products – simply aren't available in the m5550, and in addition where Alienware provide a standard one-year warranty, Rock provide

MANU	DESC	RELEASED
ATI	CATALYST X3	11 MAY 07
NVIDIA	FORCEWARE 188.22	17 MAY 07
NVIDIA	FORCEWARE 188.24	1 JUN 07
ATI	VISTA	

MANU	DESC	RELEASED
CREATIVE	X-FI 5.0 DRIVERS	30 OCT 06
CREATIVE	X-FI 5.1 DRIVERS	15 MAR 07
CREATIVE	2.130012	
CREATIVE	AUDIOCY AUDIOW 2	2 OCT 06
CREATIVE	AUDIOCY 4.2 DRIVERS	
CREATIVE	AUDIOCY FOR VISTA	14 MAR 07
CREATIVE	2.120009	

A This is a distressingly common problem, and one that Microsoft have so far failed to address properly. As you may have found from rummaging around the web, they've released at least three different Windows hotfixes over a period of several months, none of which seem to do anything.

In your shoes, I'd download the latest KB927891 patch from snipurl.com/KB927891 followed by the very latest Windows Update Agent from snipurl.com/wupdate. If that combination doesn't work, throw in the towel and turn off Automatic Updates.

I have the same problem you describe on one of my XP machines here, and having spent an entire afternoon trying to get to the root of the problem back in March, I decided to simply turn off Microsoft's automated updating. I may get a kick out of understanding and solving PC problems, I also know when to quit.



Yes it's underpowered and expensive. Just look at it though!

@ wandy@dearwandy.com

✉ dearwandy, pc zone, future publishing, 2 balcombe st, london, nw1 6nw

"Slow-downs are a real nuisance: they interrupt what you're doing and they're a serious pain to diagnose..."

Wandy commiserates with reader Craig Giles

three years of pan-European collect-and-return protection at no extra charge. And if that wasn't enough, the CTX Pro has a 1680x1050 17-inch screen as standard, where the Alienware offers 1440x900.

TOUCH OF THE JUDDERS

Q I've built my PC myself using an ASUS A8N-SLI, Athlon 3500+, 7800 GTX, 2GB RAM, a couple of SATA HDDs and an Audigy 2 ZS. I also have a couple of USB HDDs and an Epson RX620 all-in-one printer. Certain areas could do with the odd upgrade or two, but I'm happy with it.

There is a problem though. Often, it's much slower than expected, such as when going to the Control Panel for the first time after boot-up, or when looking at certain folders. The slowdown is really quite significant. Games such as *Call Of Duty* and *Company Of Heroes* don't seem to have a problem, but *Guild Wars* has a judder when selecting characters and when signing on.

My HDDs are fine, with the system drive showing 25% free and with low fragmentation, so I thought that the problem must be my XP install getting on, or perhaps that the BIOS memory settings – everything is on 'auto' – are wrong.

Either way, I'm seriously considering wiping the whole lot and starting over, and getting a couple of Raptor drives and creating a RAID 0 array. What would you suggest to upgrade my PC?

Craig Giles

A Slow-downs are a nuisance: first, they interrupt what you're doing, and second, they're a serious pain to diagnose.

I think it's unlikely to be hardware as you say both COD and COH run smoothly. Games are an excellent test of a PC's health as they give almost all your system's key resources a real good going over – audio, video, processor, hard drives and memory.

I'd say that it's most likely to be a driver issue – make sure you have the latest of everything, particularly your motherboard drivers – or an infestation of



AVG
Anti-Virus System

Protection comes free. No excuses.

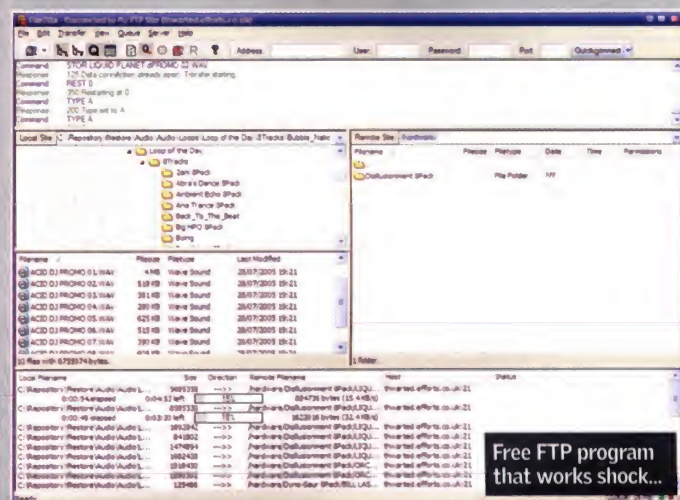
malware. BIOS settings on 'auto' is nothing to worry about.

The first thing I'd do is open Task Manager and keep an eye on your processor usage when the computer is doing its acting-up bit. Make sure you run a complete system scan using an up-to-date anti-virus utility and then with an anti-spyware tool – AVG Free is a good bet if you don't want to spend money. Processes from malware such as Trojans can cause your system to feel seriously sluggish.

Of course, it could simply be that you have too many programs trying to startup when Windows first runs, giving the impression – sometimes for a minute or more – that your rig is about to explode. Click Start, then Run, and type msconfig. Be brutal with any process shown in the Startup tab, particularly if it relates to that Epson – modern printer drivers are seriously intrusive and may be the root of your troubles. Reboot and see if it still happens.

As for upgrading, I'd forget trying to squeeze anything more from what you already have. The 939-pin AMD route is something of a dead-end, and you'll not be able to get noticeably faster without throwing serious money at something like an FX. Which will still be slower than a mid-range Core 2 Duo. So until you can afford to replace the whole lot and start over, keep your hands in your pockets. **PCZ**

50 UTILITIES YOU HAVE TO USE BEFORE YOU DIE



Free FTP program that works shock...

26 FILEZILLA

COSTS FREE FROM filezilla.sourceforge.net

It's strange, but I've been through more FTP programs than desktop wallpapers. It all started in the late 1980s with something graphical but primitive called Fetch. Fetch was a Macintosh shareware utility written by a bored somebody at Dartmouth College and featured an animated dog which fetched stuff for you from FTP sites. It also put stuff, but Fetch & Put wasn't so memorable. It's still available today and is still called Fetch, though like most things you now have to pay for the privilege of using it.

Anyway, once Windows began to look less like a glorified file manager and more like an operating system, I jumped ship to Microsoft and started to use FTP Explorer.

After moving to

Bullet Proof FTP and having had a brief fling with SmartFTP, I settled down with FTP Voyager. And now, after innumerable patches and version upgrades with what feels like a continual demand for money, I've moved on to using FileZilla.

There's a lot to like about FileZilla, starting with the fact that it's free (in comparison, FTP Voyager costs \$40 and the greedy bastards nickel-and-dime you for extras). It's also well supported by community forums on the Sourceforge site and actually does everything you would want from your file transfer client, including support for SFTP and proper queuing.

There's even a FileZilla Server to accompany the client, meaning you can give as well as receive. Don't install Windows without it.

FORUMS:
DIRECT FROM
DEARWANDY.COM

(HasAnyoneSeenMyPipe) Hi all. To cut a long story short, I was playing a bit of *BF2142* on Saturday night, when all of a sudden the screen became a mess of big triangles. I rebooted to be met with what looked like a black grid with various rectangles blacked out. I've been getting this problem ever since. I thought it was maybe a heat problem, but my card – a Gainward 7900 GT – sits at 42 idle and 54 under load. It even happens when it's idle. (Assassin) Your card is busted. (Wandy) Is anyone still playing *BF2142*? And yes, your card is knackered.



Here to help!

Companies pissing you off? Don't feel your voice is strong enough to shout down the suits? Or, has a company done something so great you want to nominate them for a 'Saints Not Sinners' mention? Email Suzy at watchdog@pczone.co.uk with the subject heading 'Watchdog', or write to her at the address above. Remember to include your name, address and contact number, and all purchasing details such as reference and invoice numbers.

Quests are broken and some features don't work



THE ACCUSED: JoWood

PROBLEM: Waiting for *Gothic 3* patch

Following on from the Ubisoft special in Watchdog last issue, reader Peter Lewis got in touch with a similar problem – but this time concerning a JoWood title. Peter explains: "Over six months ago, I bought *Gothic 3* for the PC, only to find the game was heavily bugged and unfinished. Now six months on, myself and thousands of others are still waiting for a patch to fix all the problems." Peter states that quests are broken, features such as the poison-related alchemy skill don't work and skills such as the jump attack are missing entirely. He goes on to say that he's been in touch with plenty of other *Gothic 3* fans who are all eagerly awaiting a major patch, or at least news of one, but they've heard nothing yet.

PC ZONE INVESTIGATION: As *Gothic 3* developers Piranha Bytes have now left JoWood, we contacted the publishers to see what they had to say. "As you might have heard, there will be no official patch from the developer any more. We know this is bad news, but we want all of our customers to be satisfied, so we're working on a solution." About a week later, they gave us an update: "We have an internal member of staff who's coordinating all the work from the community patches and combining them into one big patch that we will release at a later date. When members of the community deliver a good fix, they will get some money, plus their name in the manual."

So, despite there being no chance of an official patch from the developers, JoWood are at least looking to support, collate and publish the community-made patches. The *Vampire: The Masquerade – Bloodlines* community has successfully been producing its own patches, so there's still hope yet.

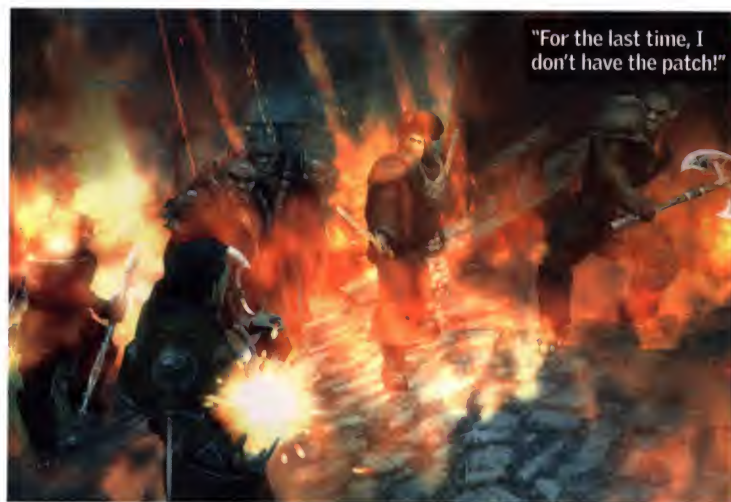
FINAL VERDICT: No official patches, but community ones will be supported by the publisher.



THE ACCUSED: MSI

PROBLEM: Problems with motherboard

Reader Stuart Marple bought an MSI SLI motherboard in March 2006, which worked without any problems until the beginning of this year. At that point, he



upgraded pretty much everything in his machine, and soon afterwards, it began to randomly shut down on him. As time went by, this mysterious problem grew worse. At first it only occurred when the machine was under heavy load (ie, playing games), but soon it began to happen during simple tasks too, such as checking emails. It was accompanied by a strange electrical sound that started to emanate from the machine.

Obviously something was up, so Stuart checked his documentation. This clearly stated that the motherboard has a two-year warranty – however, there were a few problems. The original place of purchase is no longer trading, and MSI told him to contact their resellers. However, since he didn't buy the product from them, they said that it's MSI's problem; he's still waiting on a response from MSI. Meanwhile, he's

bought himself an Asus replacement so he can continue playing *World Of Warcraft*!

PC ZONE INVESTIGATION: An MSI representative told us: "We regret that the customer has experienced such difficulty in getting support. MSI are proud of our support structure, and we believe issues such as this are very unusual. As you know, the place of purchase for any product such as this should be a customer's first point of contact. If, however, the place of purchase is unable to help, contact MSI via email at uksupport@msicomputer.co.uk. In the UK, we offer a two-year warranty on all our products. Our support team are now in the process of contacting this customer so we can resolve this at their earliest convenience."

FINAL VERDICT: Motherboard replaced, everyone happy. **PCZ**



SAINTS NOT SINNERS

amazon.co.uk

Shortly before Christmas last year, reader

Saul Clay decided he'd play Santa to himself and purchased a Logitech home theatre system from online retailer Amazon.co.uk. After five months of pounding sounds, one morning he found there was no response from the power switch. Having replaced the fuse and changed the power lead, to no avail, he contacted Amazon. After their initial conversation, he assumed that he'd be

stuck with the broken speakers for weeks – so he was quite surprised when, ten minutes later, he received a call back to say that they'd be collecting his old speakers the next day. A further ten minutes later, they confirmed that his replacement set would arrive in just a few days' time. Saul wanted to publicly thank the folks at Amazon for "being ultra-quick in sorting out my problem in just four working days! I just wish all retailers would offer such service. I'll definitely be using Amazon again!"

REMEMBER:
SPEAKERS ARE NO
GOOD IF YOU'VE
GOT NO EARS

Oh sure, shelling out bucks on those new speakers seems like a good idea. But how foolish will you feel when the debt collectors cut off your ears after you miss another mortgage payment?

HARDWARE DIVIDE

Cash in the attic? No, neither have we. We do have a credit card though...

LOADED?

GRAPHICS

8800 GTX

EXPECT TO PAY £370

MANUFACTURER XFX

WEBSITE xfxforce.co.uk

AMD have arrived! And the Radeon they brought along is nice enough, but it's neither faster or slower than the 8800 GTS, so our favourite GTX keeps hogging the top spot. Yes, we could have put the Ultra here, but it's over £500 and not much faster. Even we're not that stupid.



PROCESSOR



CORE 2 EXTREME X6800

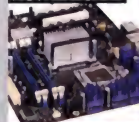
PAY £600

MAN Intel

WEB intel.com

Faster than its predecessor and faster even than any Athlon FX, Intel's new 2.93GHz Extreme processor has 1066MHz FSB, 4MB cache and LGA775 packaging. With a shorter pipeline, unique Smart Memory Access and Advanced Smart Cache technologies, its performance has people wondering what AMD can do to catch up.

MOTHERBOARD



D975XBX2

EXPECT TO PAY £155

MANUFACTURER Intel

WEB intel.com

Everything that was good about our long-term favourite D975XBX, only with a thick coating of overclocking goodness. Intel's flagship desktop product represents all that's good about the company's products: solid, reliable, no-nonsense and fast. Saddle up with a Core 2 Duo and away you go!



RAPTOR 150GB

EXPECT TO PAY £149

MANUFACTURER Western Digital

WEBSITE www.wdc.com
Travelling at 10,000rpm and with a 4.5ms seek time, the Raptor is billed as the world's fastest SATA drive. It's also now double the size, meaning you now need just one of them in your rig. But two in RAID-0 configuration will give you oodles of space and make *Battlefield 2* really fly.

SCREEN



VP930

EXPECT TO PAY £250

MANUFACTURER ViewSonic

VIEWSONIC

WEBSITE viewsonic.co.uk
With our favourite LCD1970GX stuck at around £350, the VP930 makes more sense. It's a superb all-rounder at a fantastic price, and thanks to ViewSonic's elegant styling it looks just as commanding on your desk as the ousted NEC. It also pivots, tilts and offers 270-degrees of swivel.

SOUND CARD



SOUND BLASTER X-FI FATALITY FPS

EXPECT TO PAY £140

MANUFACTURER Creative Labs
WEBSITE uk.europe.creative.com
Slightly bonkers soundcard for audiophiles with deep pockets. Supports EAX 5.0, with 64MB X-RAM for top-quality sound effects. CMSS-3D works magic on a stereo signal and makes headphone gaming crystal. Sounds nicer than an Audigy, but still ultra pricey.

SPEAKERS



Z-5500

EXPECT TO PAY £195

MANUFACTURER Logitech

LOGITECH

WEBSITE www.logitech.co.uk
The price has just dropped below £200 and these speakers are simply the best we've ever tested. They make both games and movies ravish your ears, and you'll soon find yourself blowing the dust from your old CDs and DVDs just so you can sit in the middle of the sound and revel in it.

SKINT?

GRAPHICS

RADEON X1950 PRO

EXPECT TO PAY £130

MANUFACTURER Sapphire

WEBSITE sapphiretech.com

A dazzling card at a glaringly low price. Sapphire's X1950 Pro gives you class-leading performance, beating both the GeForce 7900 GS and X1900 GT - the card on which it's based. And if you're looking to get into CrossFire, two of these filling your slots will keep you entertained for months.

PROCESSOR



CORE 2 DUO E6300

EXPECT TO PAY £105

MANUFACTURER Intel

INTEL

WEBSITE intel.com
The 1.86GHz Conroe E6300 might be a stripped-down version of its peers, but don't sneer: it clocks up like nothing else. A smaller die and lower temperatures mean that, with the right board and the right settings, it delivers amazing performance for the money. A great entry-level buy.

MOTHERBOARD



CONROEXFIRE-ESATA2

EXPECT TO PAY £52

MANUFACTURER ASRock

WEB asrock.com

Paired with an E6300, this ASRock board can help you wring high-end performance from your budget-priced rig. It features a 1066/800/533 MHz FSB, SATA II with RAID, Vista-friendly 7.1 HD audio onboard, Gigabit LAN and ASRock's easy overclocking features. It even has CrossFire support. An awful lot of features for not a lot of money.



CAVIAR 1600AAJS SATA-II

EXPECT TO PAY £30

MAN Western Digital

WD

WEBSITE www.wdc.com
It's not like a 160GB hard drive is unfeasibly huge any more, but it remains more than enough for the casual gamer to do a spot of casual gaming. A few good titles, Steam, a couple of thousand music files and the odd porn flick still leaves plenty of room for Windows to manoeuvre.

SCREEN



VA903M

EXPECT TO PAY £118

MANUFACTURER ViewSonic

VIEWSONIC

WEBSITE www.viewsonic.co.uk
The VA903m ousts our favourite VE710s as it's cheaper and has a 19-inch screen. Plus, it's a better bet than any of the similarly-priced widescreen variants as there are more pixels on the screen: its 1280x1024 panel offers greater depth than the 1440x900 panel of its sibling VA1912w.

SOUND CARD



SOUND BLASTER AUDIGY 2 VALUE

EXPECT TO PAY £32

MANUFACTURER Creative Labs
WEBSITE uk.europe.creative.com
If you're a casual gamer, there's little point throwing half a mortgage payment at your soundcard because you'll not be able to tell the difference. The cheap Audigy features EAX 4.0 and Dolby Digital EX support, and makes an awful lot of sense.

SPEAKERS



INSPIRE P5800

EXPECT TO PAY £37

MANUFACTURER Creative

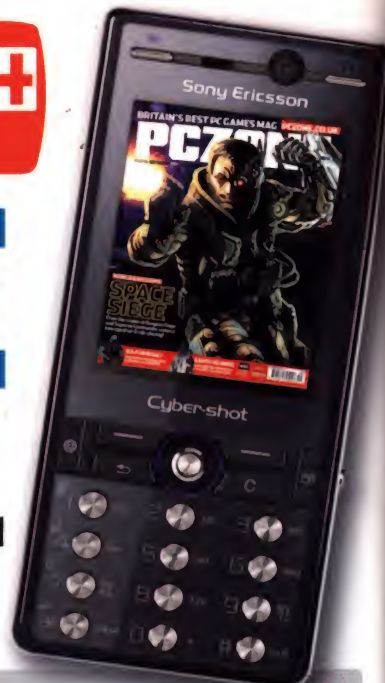
CREATIVE

WEBSITE uk.europe.creative.com
You can go cheaper, but to meet the quality of the P5800 you'll need spend a lot more, as there's no better set in this price range. The subwoofer is deep and creamy, the satellites crisp and clean. A wired remote, line-in and headphone jack complete a very decent little package.



READEROFFER

MAD4
GAMES



FREE GAME FOR PCZONE READERS!

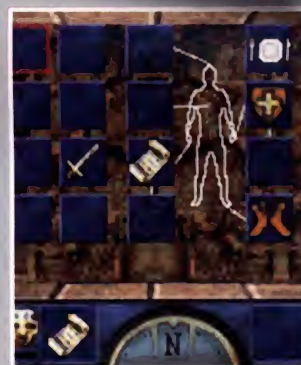
This month, we've come up with a brilliant reader offer. Download the brand-new PC GAMING mobile store to your phone and get the awesome mobile RPG adventure *Dark Horde* for free!

HOW TO GET YOUR FREE GAME

1. Text PCZONE1 to 62344
2. You'll receive a message containing a download link
3. If your phone prompts you to download, say 'YES'

DARK HORDE

A superb and atmospheric first-person RPG adventure, with tons of levels, monsters, collectable items and puzzles. Absolutely free!



TEXT PCZONE1 TO 62344

YOU PLAY, WE PAY!

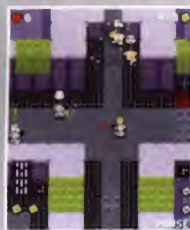
Choose from the best mobile games from just £3

MAD4GAMES' mobile store lets you download all the latest and greatest mobile games from just £3 each. No need to worry about hidden costs or sneaky subscriptions – you only pay when you actually buy something!



LEGO STAR WARS II

In pieces you will be in this galactic sequel



NEED FOR SPEED: CARBON

Tune your motor to perfection, then hit the streets



RAINBOW SIX: VEGAS

Take control of an elite team in Sin City



PROBLEMS? Check the 'help' section at www.mad4games.com/faq or call our automated helpline on 0870 737 0080 (national rates apply)

NO CLUBS, NO SUBSCRIPTIONS, GUARANTEED!

PCZONE and its partners will NOT charge you to participate in this promotion, but the process involves two downloads and requires a WAP and/or data connection for which your operator may charge at your normal rate. Offer expires July 19, 2007. Download and use of the game in this special offer is subject to GPRS coverage, handset capability and network availability. Offer available on UK networks only. At peak times, SMS traffic may be subject to network delay. Once connected, the service will check product compatibility with your handset, or for a full list of compatible handsets and help on other issues, go to www.mad4games.com/tandc/future.html. By participating in this promotion, you agree to abide by these terms and conditions and by our full terms of service published at www.mad4games.com/tandc/future.html. LucasArts and the LucasArts logo are trademarks of Lucasfilm Ltd. © 2006 Lucasfilm Entertainment Company Ltd. or Lucasfilm Ltd. and TM as indicated. All rights reserved. © TT Games Publishing Ltd 2006. Published by THQ Wireless and TT Games under license from the LEGO Group. LEGO, the LEGO logo and Minifigure are trademarks of the/son des marques de commerce de/son marcas registradas de LEGO Group. © 2006 The LEGO Group. All rights reserved. THQ, THQ Wireless and their respective logos are trademarks and/or registered trademarks of THQ Inc. All Rights Reserved. All other trademarks, logos and copyrights are property of their respective owners. Need For Speed: Carbon © 2006 Electronic Arts Inc. Electronic Arts, Need For Speed, EA and the EA logo are trademarks or registered trademarks of Electronic Arts Inc. in the U.S. and/or other countries. All Rights Reserved. Mitsubishi Lancer Evolution IX MR – Mitsubishi and Lancer Evolution names, emblems and body designs are trademarks and/or intellectual property rights of MITSUBISHI MOTORS CORPORATION and used under license to Electronic Arts Inc. Dodge Challenger Concept, Dodge HEMI and their trade dress are used under license by Electronic Arts. Rainbow Six: Vegas © 2006 Gameloft. All Rights Reserved. Published by Gameloft under license from Ubisoft Entertainment. Rainbow Six, Red Storm and the Red Storm logo are trademarks of Red Storm Entertainment in the US and/or other countries. Red Storm Entertainment, Inc. is a Ubisoft Entertainment company. Ubisoft and the Ubisoft logo are trademarks of Ubisoft Entertainment in the US and/or other countries. Gameloft is a trademark of Gameloft in the U.S. and/or other countries.



PCZONE

FREEPLAY



We were poor, but we were *happy*

WHAT'S FREE THIS MONTH



Steamy windows

MY GAMING MACHINE has ground to a halt. Years of constant installations and partial uninstalls have left my hard drive in a filthier state than my pizza bib, and my registry is more full of history than a serial killer's chest freezer.

It came to a head when *Doom 3* wouldn't install. It seemed to think it was already installed, and eagerly set about uninstalling, and wouldn't stop. My own uneducated fumbling inside Window's murkier guts only served to stop other important programs from working, so now I'm left with an outwardly proud-looking, but grotesquely hobbled PC.

So I'm going to take my life into my own hands and do a clean install of Windows. Tie up my most beloved files in a spotted hanky, and type the most feared nine characters of all time: > format c:

God, I got a tiny thrill from typing that, even in a Word document. It felt like Sir Gerald, the helpful Office paper clip, could pop up and say: "It looks like you're trying to format your hard drive! I'm the best at that, let me do it, not listening, bye!"

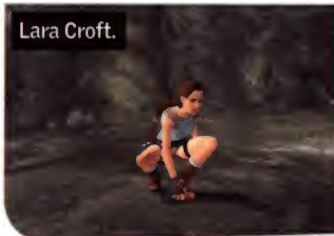
What am I scared of? Steve did it before installing Vista. But then again, Steve's young and fresh-faced - he can rebuild his life if something goes wrong. Besides, he only formatted a partition, which is like saying: "I'm committing suicide of the last ten years of my life". What I'm doing is important.

Then again, I suppose it's only a work computer. Fuck it.

Jon Blyth

Jon Blyth, staff writer

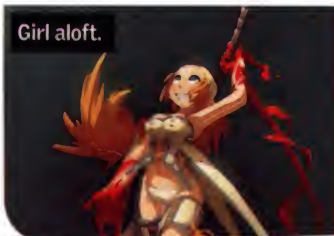
Lara Croft.



106 Demo pages

Try before you buy, but don't snip the label or you'll pay full price

Girl aloft.



108 News

Slower than the internet, but less covered in crap

The public scoffed...



112 Freeware

We root out the freest no-strings fun there is

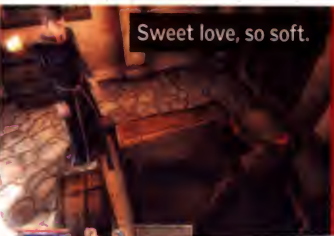
...But caps get doffed.



114 Play!

Three Source mods you'd be crackers to ignore

Sweet love, so soft.



116 Jackass

Oblivion special: how to regain that loving feeling with radiant AI

Erm, pigeon loft?



118 Online Zone

Fight! Chat! Forums! Blogs! And Postcards From The Edge...



PCZONE
FREE-O-METER



0
HOURS

*Approximate amount of completely free stuff this month

410.0
HOURS*



Demos

Jon Blyth rounds up our free DVD



Having problems getting something on our DVD to work? Phone our helpline on **01225 442244** and ask for cover-disc support. Alternatively, email **support@futurenet.co.uk**, including as much information as possible about your system and the nature of your problem.

TOMB RAIDER: ANNIVERSARY

Go Lara, it's your birthday www.tombraider.com

DO YOU WANT to know why you never see Lara Croft naked? It's not because of decency – there's none of that nonsense in videogames. It's because her body is a collage of welts, scars and bruises. For ten years, she's been mauled by tigers, dinosaurs and Frenchmen, and hurled her pliable torso against spikes and rock walls.

This needn't bother players of this demo, however. Crystal Dynamics have followed up *Legend* with another belter of a Lara game, and you'll be able to play a level from the first, Peruvian chapter of the remade classic. It's the old 'you need three cogs' level, where one's lying around, one's slightly hidden, and if you're not methodical, you'll be hunting around for the third for two hours, before saying, "Oh I always hated *Tomb Raider* anyway," and going to watch TV.

Whether you're fresh to the money-shitting franchise, or just want your memories fiddled with (easy tiger), this is well worth a look.



EARTH

Here, Lara is expressing kinship with Mother Earth by crouching, and letting her fingertips rest in the dirt. She is one with the tomb, and time is a fingerless glove, through which her soiled fingernails do protrude.

WATER

Giving proper deference to Gaia's bringer of life, Lara swims through a sodden passage to find a medikit. It's so beautifully poetic, Lara sheds a tear. This drops into the river, making the metaphor slightly unmanageable.



MUSIC AND MOTION Lara performs the latest in interpretive dance...

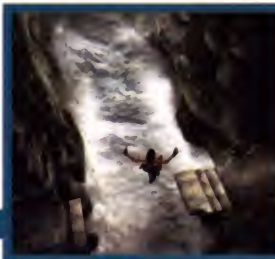
FIRE

To complete the elemental fugue, Lara empties two pistol clips into a couple of bats, before picking up the corpses, ripping their wings off and headbutting the wall. Then she drags her teeth across the granite floor, and screams.



AIR

Croft's homage to the elements of nature continues, as she uses her body to soar through the very air that keeps aloft the noble Eagle, and the slightly less noble Peewit. Lara now has the word Peewit stuck in her brain.



GHOST RECON: ADVANCED WARFIGHTER 2

Multiplayer buddycam
ghostrecon.uk.ubi.com

RAW 2 MAY FEEL like a lot more of the same, rather than a true sequel, but it's hardly the kiss of death to a game as strong as *RAW*. The multiplayer is new, though – with one team of crack buddycam sneakers versus a bunch of respawning brutes with less of the cool technology available to them.

Don't be scared by the French unzip package – just click *Extraitz-Vous* instead of 'Ooh La La Annuler Tout Le Monde', and you'll be back with your mother tongue in no time.



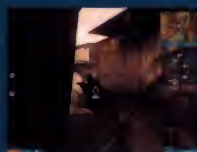
You've got a friend

But it's not like Facebook, where everyone's your friend...



FRIENDS

This is your friend. When he dies, he'll get put into your helmet and can look around and alert you to stuff. It's all a bit like *Rogue Trooper*, but without the frisky dialogue.



ENEMIES

This is also when you think, "Oh hang on, I don't know who that is, I'd better not shoot, I can't imagine anything worse than murdering your friend," before getting a bullet in your nose. Silly you.

OVERLORD She wants to be evil

www.codemasters.co.uk/games/?gameid=1996

EARTHA KITT FAMOUSLY sang that she wanted to be evil. Eartha envisioned her new, evil life would involve hurting flies, drinking booze and according to the lyrics we found on the internet, she's also keen on "trumping an ace". We can only imagine that to mean firing tennis balls out of her arse, which sounds pretty damn evil.

What she wasn't anticipating, perhaps,

was commanding an army of imps to wreak pumpkin-related havoc and butcher sheep at your capricious whim.

Overlord is the excellently written and hugely playable game that casts you as the reborn master of a lost dark empire, who must regain his empire with the help of a small army of goblins. If that sounds fun, it's because it is.



1 These guys kill sheep, move stuff around and fetch you back precious life force. Amazingly, their banter never gets annoying.

2 This is you. You are the Overlord. With fireballs and an axe, you're quite the vile monster about town.

3 Physics in action: kill sheep, eat life energy, convert life energy into more imps. Thus, nature's balance is maintained.

SO NOT OVER IT

You get me doh?



TOWER HEART

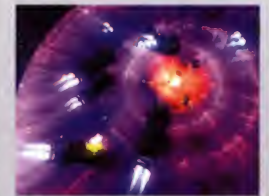
That's the very heart of your tower. To retrieve it, you'll have to fight your way through a patch of inert pumpkins.



NARRATOR

This guy has swallowed a goth dictionary, and I wouldn't be surprised if he used the word 'elritch' at some point.

THE BEST OF THE REST



SPACE FORCE: ROGUE UNIVERSE

www.spaceforce-game.com
This looks like it might turn out to be a belter; the colourful galactic dust stylings of *Space Force* make it look prettier than your average space trade-shooter.



SURF'S UP

surfsupgame.us.ubi.com
If the appeal of a penguin called Cody Maverick taking part in a surfing competition doesn't appeal to you, then you should play this anyway, just to stop being a big grumpy-puss.



PIRATES OF THE CARIBBEAN: AT WORLD'S END

<http://tinyurl.com/32Gw8d>
Does the idea of playing the game of an overlong film excite? Would you like to see Jack Sparrow with the emotionless death of videogame animation in his eyes? Then play this.



ATTACK ON PEARL HARBOR

www.pearlharbor-game.com/
Can you ferry all the reluctant clams to safety, before the mechanical seagull swivels his gigantic eye into place? Hang on... What's that you say? World War II what? Oh. Never mind, then.



HARRY POTTER AND THE ORDER OF THE PHOENIX

<http://tinyurl.com/3axbnr>



Quite surprisingly, for the fifth inevitable game in a line-up of seven inevitable games, it seems that some effort has been made to make this one more playable, more fun, and engaging for kids and adults alike. We know – we're as surprised as you are.

18 WHEELS OF STEEL: ACROSS AMERICA

www.gamershell.com/download_19787.shtml



Count my wheels, you Fiat Punto-driving babies! That's right – 18. Do you know what they're made of? That's right, cold, deadly steel. And do you know where we're going with those wheels? Oh. You do? Who told you? It was meant to be a surprise.

SNIPPETS



ABE'S ODDYSSEY

tinyurl.com/2xd9tt

When remaking a retro game, the usual form is to make it better. Not so for the Trophimchuk brothers, who decided to take the PlayStation classic and remake it – for the Spectrum 128. If you thought the original was missing colour clash and had way too many pixels, this might be what you need to cure your Oddworld sophistication blues.



FLASH STARCRAFT

tinyurl.com/y7ctk3

Many of us want to get a feel for *StarCraft*, but we don't have a bank account and are utterly unable to bring ourselves to leave the safety of the chair in front of our computer. At last, someone has made a Flash version of the game; now we can all play a less-responsive and strangely reactive version of the best RTS to ever get a sequel, ten years later.

BIG IN FRANCE

Jon Blyth plays the anglicised MMORPG *Dofus* for free

www.dofus.com

DOFUS IS INCREDIBLY popular abroad; it claims to have players in the millions, and is particularly big with our Gallic neighbours, the French. And it's easy to see the appeal; the concept art is gorgeous. It's evocative, dynamic, imaginative and downright lovely to look at – there's a manga version. It combines that curiously French quality with more Eastern influences – the low-level spiders have a pretty charming similarity to Miyazaki's soot creatures in *Spirited Away*. Best of all though, it works.

That gushing first paragraph aside, it's a shame that the in-game graphics don't follow through on the promise. Because the action takes place over a number of beautifully drawn – but static, and 2D –

screens, the avatars are necessarily quite small, and it's often difficult to see where you are. This is especially true if you choose, as I did, the happy grass-coloured guy.

The charm of *Dofus* is more than just the game, though; it's in the world, the personality and the humour. Barely any dialogue goes by without some kind of wisecrack, and even if the jokes don't always square with our more British tastes, you can – and will – ignore them.

Dofus has a huge range of arcane-sounding professions – which become less arcane when you realise they're mostly anagrams, or spelled backwards – and the combat is an interesting turn-based mix of speed chess and *WOW*. It's slower, but

it's tolerable; even if you start off far too weak, and take a hammering from even the softest balls of white gobbly fur. Teaming up is, as always, the most rewarding way to go – but not many people seemed keen to help such a needy, confused newbie as myself.

You'll have to get used to the Flash interface, which necessarily brings with it the internet way of clicking on things. You're only ever a right-click away from an immersion-breaking 'About Flash Player' menu, and with mouseover events replacing these contextual menus, there's a chaotic edge to proceedings.

Once in though, *Dofus* is a sweet, interesting game that could absorb a younger audience, and it does hint at depth and invention at later stages.



Freshly textured rental accommodation.



This forest needs guns and enemies.

CRYSIS MODS ON THE WAY

Obsidian Edge 2 to be released just after the game itself

www.obsidianedge.net

FOR A MODDER, getting invited to a 'summit' with Crytek and EA must be like getting patted on the head by a gigantic, velvet hand. To be given exclusive access to the goings-on in the much-anticipated game's code, that must be like getting scooped up in that plushly quilted paw, and lifted to a cloud where you spend the rest of your life eating delicious calorie-free cakes.

That's what happened in March to the boys behind *Obsidian Edge* (a well-received *Far Cry* multiplayer mod), and their sequel is going to be one of the first modifications to follow the release of *Crysis*. They'll be doing their usual thing of new multiplayer modes, maps (the original has 20 custom maps) weapons and character designs; at the moment, what stands out is those

models and textures, which look genuinely professional.

Due for release just after the time that *Crysis* is propelled from the Crytek offices, *Obsidian Edge 2* will have to wait for the hubbub surrounding the game itself to die down. However, from past form and what we can see so far, it looks like it'll be well worth having in your mods folder.

SLAYER CAKE *Vampire Slayer 2.0* delivers more Payne

maxpayne2.levels4you.com

IF YOU'RE GOING to kill vampires, you need it to look cool and you'll be wanting to do it in bullet-time. If you're really into murdering those night-walking cowbogs, you'll be up for some magic spells and special effects. *Vampire Slayer 2.0*, a mod for *Max Payne 2*, is currently nearing completion, and the developers have released a gameplay trailer which makes it all seem... Well, pretty damn impressive, since you ask.

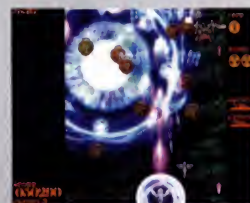
You'll play as a Vampire Slayer or Dark Wizard; the Slayer will wield weapons such as the 'big sword' (their words, not ours) and 'bracelet'. The bracelet fires out powerful silver blades, in case you were worried the game was about accessorising. The Dark Wizard has

access to more visually impressive spells – the clip of him using two silver crosses puts you in mind of a souped-up 3D *Castlevania* title.

Vampire Slayer 2.0 has no release date as yet, but it's already winning awards from within the modding community; this is definitely one we'll be featuring when it's ready.



SNIPPETS



EXCEED 3RD JADE PENETRATE

tinyurl.com/2q58cs

This isn't an erotic game where you have to put it into Ms Goody four times to win. Instead, it's an impressive shooter from Tennen-Sozai. At over 250MB, it's beefy, but we couldn't resist mentioning it, just because of the name.



MACHINIMA TITBITS

www.machinima.com/films.php?id=22653

Escape From Orgrimmar has released another trailer in the run-up to its Blizzcon debut in August. This trailer stands out mainly for the line, "Boomkin piece of shit", which is delivered with aggressive aplomb.

Bug-Fix of the Month

THIS MONTH
BATTLESTATIONS:
MIDWAY V1.1



The propeller on the 'please wait' screen is now spinning. As is our head at such ace news.

Movie of the month

ASSASSIN'S CREED

The crowd-manipulating stealth-killer game that remains hotly anticipated despite a few months of silence, the new *Assassin's Creed* movie features none of the sci-fi allusions we've since learned about the game. But it's looking bloody lush, so it is, and the video has *Lonely Soul* by Unkle playing over it.



Not the best camouflage, but crouching in front of crucifixes says something about you...



It's not all crouching, though – sometimes you'll be running, perhaps even on a road.



And when you're not running or crouching, you'll be slicing people open with swords.



Excellent. Now to leap off the building. I'm in a simulator in the future, right?



RUNNING WITH LIZARDS

NCsoft's free-to-play MMO *Dungeon Runners* is almost as zany as Jon Blyth...

www.dungeonrunners.com

THE FIRST THING you'll think after the half-gig download is, "Hello, I recognise some of elements of this game". It's most noticeable when you press Escape and the menu pops up. "Ah. It's *WOW*," you'll think, because it's nearly pixel-identical to the *WOW* Escape menu. This isn't accidental, but once you start playing, however, all thoughts of *WOW* will vanish, as you realise that *Dungeon Runners* is actually rooted in *Diablo*.

You start said MMO in a small area, with a number of yellow exclamation marks to talk to, a portal to a town and an entrance to a randomly-generated dungeon. Fighting the creatures is a matter of mapping a power to your right and left mouse buttons, and randomly invented loot flies out of their bodies with old-school enthusiasm.

The classes are ultra-vanilla – Warrior, Mage or Ranger. Mages start with a (wa-hey!) fireball, and a lightning bolt that can strike five enemies at once, which feels excitingly over-powered, but the money required for the next level will require a good few hours play. You also recover health and mana rapidly, so there's less hanging around between aggroing the mini-mobs. It's dynamic, it's

not too complicated, and – dare I say it – it's pretty enjoyable to play, in a neo-nostalgic way. There's no PVP yet, but it's on the way.

There's one wee caveat, and that's the sense of humour. *Dungeon Runners* fancies itself as quite the comedian, and whereas it's fun to play a game that doesn't take itself too seriously, it's also off-putting to have a game jump up and down and go "Oo! Oo!" to amuse you. It often works – the XP meter demon is actually quite sweet – but by Level 10, the caustic vendors really gave me the hump.

The best and worst thing about the game is the other people, and *Dungeon Runners* has a moderately-populated mix of arseholes, jesters (encouraged by the game itself), decent people, pre-teens and braggards. To get a decent group, simply watch the world chat and befriend anyone who says: "Jesus Christ you guys, can you stop pissing on each other for a minute?" Worked for me.

Dungeon Runners is free-to-play, and premium services come at a \$5 monthly charge. This includes potion-

stacking, phatter loot and priority over the freeloading scum (us included). You'll still need to create a PlayNC account, but this is definitely worth a look.



BUSY REMAKING NOTHING

Retro Remakes: making the games you never played

www.retroremakes.com/forum2/showthread.php?t=9244

IN ITS SECOND series, *Look Around You* (2005's fantastic comedy show spoofing the stilted educational TV shows of the '80s) did a great episode about computers. In the show, the presenter talked about games and demonstrated a carousel of packaged spoof games. *Bibbleman*, *Horse Fighter*, *Pongo*, *Space Cabbage*. All games you'd never heard of, but suddenly, really wanted to play.

Luckily, the fine folk who populate the Retro Remakes forum had a competition, and they've pretty much made the lot. *Horse Puncher* (the only game to be actually shown in the program) is lovingly reproduced with identical horse squeals, and the rest... Well, they've made them up from scratch. This is exactly the kind of thing we can't applaud enough, and if someone doesn't give the Retro Remakes people a million pounds pretty damn soon, there's no justice.



Remember Pongo?
Of course you don't.



Play again (Y/N).

INDIE GAMES ARE RUBBISH



Says indie developer
Dan Marshall

That's a vast, unfair generalisation I know, but by and large it's true. A

few glimmering examples aside, they're generally slap-dash, half-arsed muck that the average 'proper' gamer quite rightly won't even notice, let alone play. Who'd play another lacklustre *Breakout* clone when they've got *Crysis* on their hard drive? I wouldn't.

We all know how indie games should be. Free from marketing people, publishers and targets, indie games should be small, funky examples of boiled-down 'fun' in a jar. Sadly, given that the people that make them need to eat and buy shoes and stuff, instead they're stuck coding nice safe-but-dull games they know people will buy, rather than anything that hits the railings with a stick.

The lack of cash in the indie trade is a horrific loss to those of us who love games, and that's where I hope Gibbage.co.uk steps in. The site sells the very best indie games out there; proper fun, different, kooky little bundles of joy. Most of the cash goes directly to the game's developer, and every penny of profit on top of that is being put directly into a kitty.

All that cash then gets stuffed into a vast, swelling envelope so we can hunt down some promising, struggling indies and say: "Hey! You guys have got the right idea! Here's a load of money - go do something utterly amazing with it."

If it works, future generations of developers will be spared the embarrassing slog of making yet another *Match-3* to pay their way, and gamers will have the sort of mind-bendingly ingenious games the mainstream developers can't produce because of 'the man'.



This mech was brought to you by Max Factor.

CPS-3 EMULATED

Stand up and fight!

www.mame.net

THE CAPCOM PLAY System 3 was the last board to be manufactured by Capcom. For a 2D board, it was pretty hardcore, but with only six games and an extreme copy protection system, it seemed like a low priority for emulation. But the MAME team are about to fill in some more of the ever-dwindling emulation gaps.

So, if you want to play *Warzard* or any of the *Street Fighter III* games for cheeky-free on your PC, or if you'd like a violent manga adventure with JoJo, then by the time you're reading this, the new version of MAME will probably already be available.



Tremble before the fearsome thighs of Chun-Li.

KEEP IT FREE

In-game ads for *Quake Wars*

www.enemyterritory.com

WHEN EA ANNOUNCED *Battlefield 2142* would have targeted in-game ads, we all clutched our furrowed brows at this new depth of cynical profiteering.

Since then, we've all moved on to other causes - like air-dropping free copies of *Manhunt 2* into primary schools - so when we discovered *Enemy Territory: Quake Wars* would carry similar adverts, we barely batted an eyelid. If it keeps the public servers and online rankings free, so be it.

Besides, no-one complained when Weetabix released a *Space Invaders* clone where you shoot other cereals - although, erm, they did give it away for free. Let's just keep the adverts for Omax Personal Massagers off the Strogg's hats, eh?



Freeware



Steve Hogarty delves into the artistic side of free gaming

Freeware brings you the best free games content the Net has to offer. This month, our freeware is made up of chalk, paper and crayons. All we're missing is those acrylic paints Neil Buchanan swears by. He's hoarding those for the biggest *Art Attack* ever.

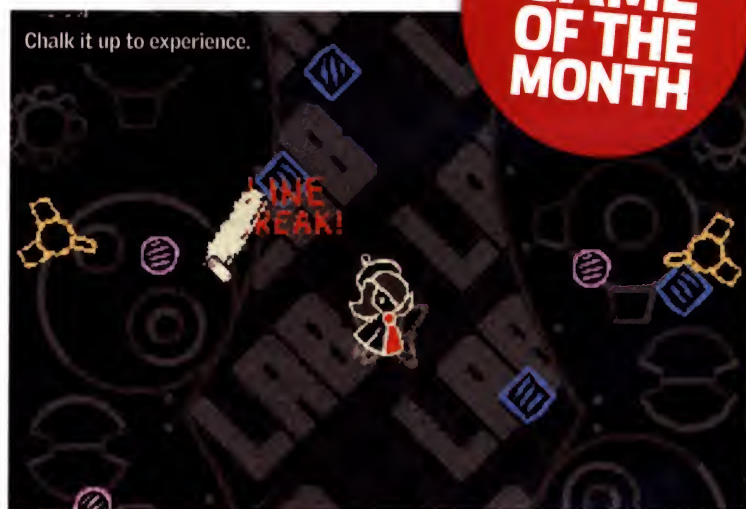
CHALK Goes well with cheese

Dev: Joakim Sandberg | www.konjak.org

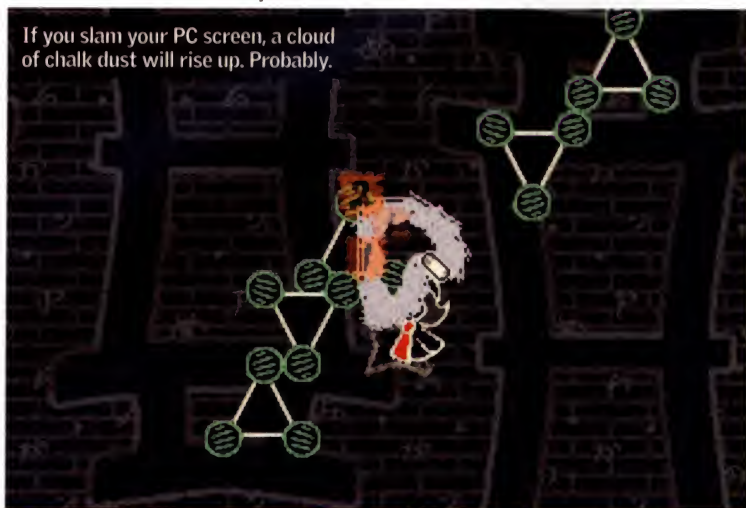
FREEWARE TITLES ARE being neatly slotted into the handheld market, and it seems to be happening with increasing regularity. *Cave Story* will eventually show up on somebody's Sony PSP or Nintendo DS, and it's only recently been announced that freeware Flash game *N* will soon be ported to handhelds, becoming playable on the tube, train or remote mountaintop of your choice. With *Chalk*, it's clear that somebody needs to throw Joakim Sandberg a Nintendo DS devkit. It's a game more suited to a touch-screen than any other freeware title we could care to name. Actually, it's a game more suited to a touch-screen than many DS games we could care to name too.

Chalk is a side-scrolling shooter, if you want to wrap it in a basic genre title. As you move from left to right, through a pretty chalk world, you draw chalk lines on chalk obstacles to make them poof into chalk dust. Chalk ships fire chalk bullets at you, and in order to chalk destroy them, you draw chalk lines between the bullets and ships themselves. Join more than one bullet to more than one ship, a task made difficult by your limited supply of chalk (which also negates the ability to draw a penis), and you get glorious damage multipliers and extra points.

What I enjoy about *Chalk* most is that it doesn't rest on these simple rules, instead taking them to grand new heights – genuinely innovative bosses interject the levels, and new obstacles such as the line-breaking blue diamonds come into play later on. These diamonds



♥ x4 | 207 | P 29600



♥ x4 | 13 | P 37500



♥ x4 | 227 | P 15100

can be chucked about the screen to clear them, or in the case of certain bosses, chucked about to cause damage. They explode too, detonating any nearby diamonds and making your chalk lines that much easier to draw.

It's simply a very clever game, and it doesn't stop short at being an 'interesting premise', as so many of these games do. Grab it now.



♥ x4 | 91 | P 25300



ALEX ADVENTURE Bonjour!

Dev: Tomvert | tomvert.free.fr

IN OUR NEVER-ENDING quest to needlessly point out what country a game comes from when it's not coming from America or Britain, here's a French platformer called *Alex Adventure*. It's in the vein of freeware greats such as *Lyle In Cube Sector*, and while it never puts out the vast amount of charm that game seems to so effortlessly expel, it's quite able to impress.

A tip before you start, and something I figured out all by myself: run it in compatibility mode for Windows 95 to prevent the low-res visuals being horribly stretched to a soft-focus, full-screen. And erm, it's probably best if you don't probe around this guy's website too much. Everything besides the link to download *Alex Adventure* is brilliantly demented and, how shall we put it, a bit French.

AND YET IT MOVES "More of a twitch, really"

Dev: kwart | www.andyetitmoves.at

THE INDEPENDENT GAMES

FESTIVAL is continually spewing out mad and beautiful things, and people dance merrily in the resulting shower of indie and freeware games until they're soaked in hot innovation.

One product of all this festivity is a side-scrolling adventure game called *And Yet It Moves*, and while it lasts a mere two levels, it's an excellent way to burn what would probably be an otherwise squandered half hour. Your character, who strongly resembles the most despised fizzy drink mascot ever, is a paper man trapped in a paper world. In fact, it's this feature that's most striking about *And Yet It Moves* – the entire game looks like a beautiful collage of torn photographs. You could nail screenshots of this to the walls of the Tate Modern.

Only mildly less striking is the ability of the player to rotate the world 90-degrees in either direction, allowing you to walk on walls and ceilings, carefully manoeuvre boulders into positions, and, on the second level, solve extremely clever puzzles.

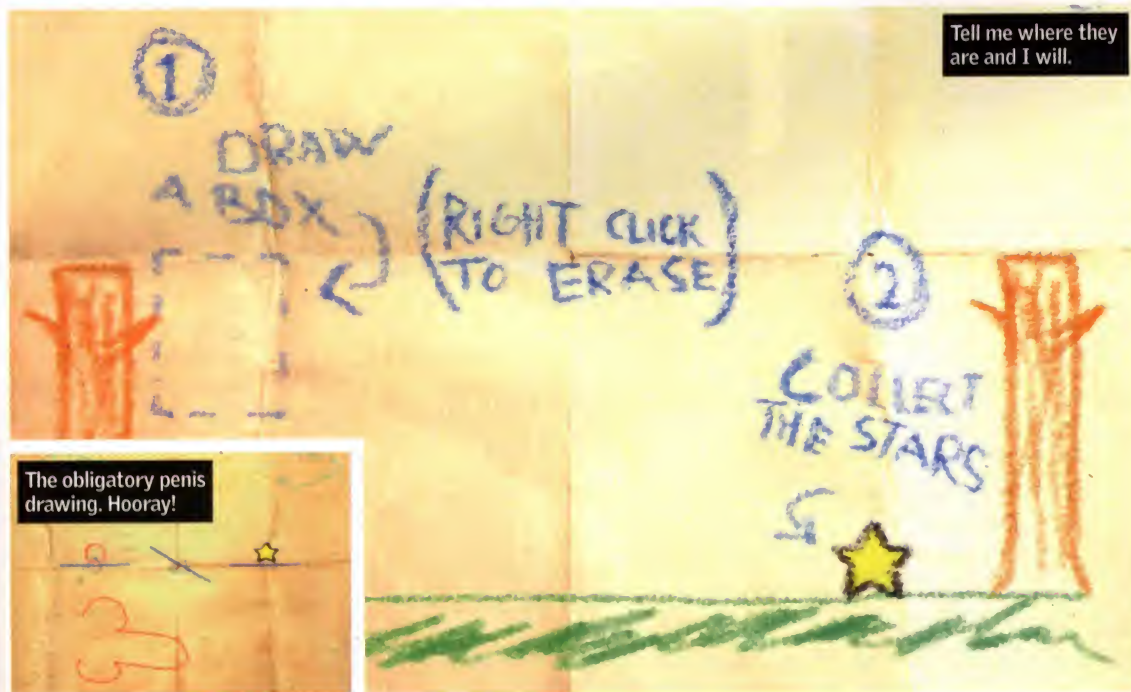
I won't tell you what those puzzles are, as mentioning just one would spoil a great percentage of such a short game, but trust me when I say they keep you confused long enough to go "ahhhhhh!" when you figure out how it all works. The controls are occasionally a bit glitchy, and the level design sometimes lets you creep off the edge of the map. Despite this, *And Yet It Moves* is both eye-catchingly pretty and incredible fun to play. Bonus points for the inclusion of a violent monkey.



Rip it up and start again. Or don't.

CRAYON PHYSICS

Almost as complicated as quantum Dev: Kloonigames | www.kloonigames.com



The obligatory penis drawing. Hooray!

FROM THE FAST-PACED world of rapid-fire game development we have *Crayon Physics*, a puzzler that asks nothing more of you than to roll a ball into a star. It's the product of Petri Purho's mission to create one experimental game per month, which is one more than you, so don't be too harsh on its inevitable shortcomings.

You control a magical crayon that can draw physics objects in the sky, and the aim is to use these freshly created shapes to nudge and launch the ball towards the star. It's odd though, and slightly disappointing, that complicated shapes revert to simple squares, disallowing any sort of clever construction – but this

doesn't prevent you completing any levels.

Maybe one day Petri will come back to *Crayon Physics*, his little unfinished robot child, and give it the robo-legs it yearns for. "Finish... Me..." it mournfully bleeps from beneath a pile of boxes. "Love... Me?" Sorry little robot, but Petri has moved on, his interests as fleeting as a summer breeze.

WEBGAME OF THE MONTH OSHIDAMA PLUS



www.game-pure.com/flash/oshidama

Playing *Oshidama Plus* is like playing pool against a really careful pool player, who only takes really short, infuriating shots. In this game, you must nudge the ball across the screen to the goal, avoiding bumpers and holes specifically placed to annoy and frustrate. What it's missing is an opportunity to really whack the ball with some force, which while we realise would turn it into a mini-golf game, would still be a massive improvement.

As ever though, you'll probably find yourself playing it for a good 15 minutes before giving up. *Oshidama Plus* is the sort of webgame you hate yourself for playing, but the calm music and soft sound effects blind you to the sheer rage bubbling up inside. For suppressing our anger so effectively, it gets a thumbs up and a half.



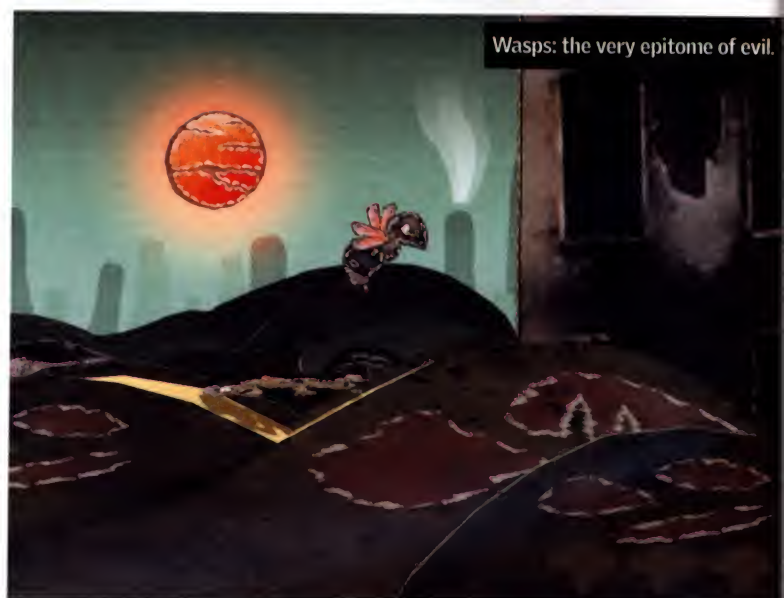
Climbing walls: an evil pastime.



Skipping through meadows: what nice people do.



Also lovely: rainbows and honeybees.



Wasps: the very epitome of evil.

Play: **MOD**



FLIPSIDE

Jon Blyth can't hide from the flipside



flipside.thegame.googlepages.com/ | Mod for: Half-Life 2

THE IDEA OF us humans having two sides to our personality is old. It's also a superficial excuse to distance ourselves from our more unacceptable desires, but that's hardly helping to review this mod. What this theory usually isn't is a literal description of a stunningly-realised world of home-brewed schizophrenia.

You start *Flipside* in a colourful cardboard toyland with a jarring squeal of delight. You flip and bounce through a harmless world of sunshine, rainbows and bunches of pink roses, and the worst that can happen is an aggressive cuddle. With an immortal hop, a fearless skip and a gleeful jump, you'll reach your first barrier.

A rabbit. It's OK, you can jump higher than rabbits, so just double-hop over him, and be on your gleeful, effeminate way.

Some things can't be jumped over or tickled into submission, and you'll need some darker powers to progress. Swivel the camera around, and the game world changes completely. Roses become toadstools, bunnies become bloodstained nurses, and you develop the ability to climb, and headbutt nurses.

Most disturbing of all is the tutorial prompt – 'Try to kill the nurse!' – a phrase which has probably bounced around the head of every woman-hating psychopath in the world. Bees become wasps – less able to chase you, but more deadly when

they catch you. It's such a gorgeous adventure that you'll forgive the difficulty, even if it does feel slightly unfair and over-demanding early on.

Flipside is such a highly stylised and impressive mod, with such a simple and original premise, that it almost feels wrong to be playing it for free, considering the repetitive crap we'll happily fork out for. However, before it gets to that cash-worthy stage, there needs to be a less severe learning curve, and attacks that actually feel like they connect. A couple of tweaks to the keyboard controls would be nice too, but at least it feels a lot more natural on a gamepad. Expect to see more of this.



ZOMBIE MASTER



Michael Wass has a legion in the region www.zombiemaster.org | Mod for: Half-Life 2

WE'RE FOND OF zombies, but your average zombie holocaust multiplayer mod seems like the massacre of a swarm of thoughtless green meat. They're a hollow echo of the subtlety and desperation that Romero and Fulci managed to get across in their undead movie classics, or that we'd probably feel if our grandparents arose to suck out our brains.

Zombie Master does things differently. The game randomly selects a single player, who will become the titular Zombie Master. As the ZM, they must hinder the progress of a team of survivors, earning credits by killing humans and the like, and spending those credits on... Well, on more zombies.

The survivors must complete map-specific objectives, which range from restoring power to blast furnaces, to a haphazard escape. Although the *Zombie Master* has power over a variety of the undead, the human teams are able to work together to construct makeshift barricades and have access to a decent range of weaponry. The mechanics

encourage strategic team play, and there's a sense of theatre that many contemporaries fail to inspire.

Although a Beta, this is potentially one of the better zombie mods the community has to offer, and could keep you happy until *Left4Dead* bursts its sores.

Play: MOD



Get your zombie fix here.



Tasty.

AWAKENING

Need more coffee...

awakening.hl2files.com/ | Mod for: Half-Life 2



SO FAR, WE'VE seen a couple of innovative uses of the Source engine. *Flipside* recreates a beautiful semi-2D world unlike 99% of the mods out there, and *Zombie Master* successfully pulls off that new RTS vs FPS gameplay that's beginning to rear its head more and more often. *Awakening* is your old-school single-player extra HL2 levels, but none the worse for it.

Taking the palette of sight and sounds provided by Valve, Bluestrike have managed to create an involving and atmospheric set of levels. It's a little less generous with the health than Valve, but according to the development team it'll only take an hour to complete. Don't take it as a sign of ineptitude, but it took us a fair bit longer than that.

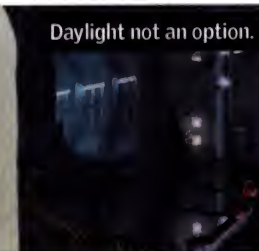
After an overlong and processor-punishing intro film that would have Valve's exposition-masters wincing, the game itself provides five well thought-out levels. Sure, you'll be crawling along a few too many pipes, and the voice-acting isn't John Geilgud, but the fact remains this is a fairly playable homage to a great game.

Play: MOD



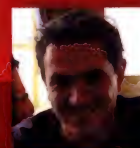
Five levels, oodles of guns, plenty of running about.

Daylight not an option.



They're in front of you!

INTELLIGENT DESIGN



WITH MAXIS SENIOR DESIGNER: ALEX HUTCHINSON

Not so simple

It's easy to see why superficial observers of our industry believe videogames are the source of the world's youth violence, as a startling number of games have some representation of combat as a central mechanic. This statistic is not in dispute. The misunderstanding is that players enjoy these games because of their simulated violence, whereas I believe that their popularity lies in the fact that head-to-head combat is one of the few inherently perfect mechanics in gaming.

It requires skill (you need to shoot quickly and accurately), risk (a slow or inaccurate shot will end your game) and reward (a good shot will lead to story or level progression and often new items). Plus, all of it is packaged in a real-world metaphor that's easy to explain and has strong internal logic. It's also easy to scale and tune as you can easily make challenges harder or simpler with a few tuning variables.

Never have I been excited in a game because I 'killed' the opposing collection of polygons, but I'm eternally satisfied by playing well, overcoming challenges within a game and picking up my reward. These are base urges that this mechanic satisfies. The challenge for designers is to find more mechanics that satisfy these basic urges that don't revolve around violence – mechanics that preferably promote creation rather than destruction.

If training puppies or tending a garden could be made as satisfying as a well structured shoot-out, then not only would games appeal to a broader audience, but better still, I wouldn't ever have to sit through another ridiculous news report on how games are turning children into mindless killing machines.

SPORE IS DUE OUT IN 2008 -
WWW.SPORE.COM

PCZONE JACKASS

STAR-CROSSED LOVERS



One of the great selling points of *Fable* was that you could get married. Even in *Fallout*, you could have a shotgun wedding, until your wife got eaten by rats. However, *Oblivion* didn't let you tie that conjugal knot. No, if you wanted a joyous domestic life in *Elder Scrolls*, you had to work within an unforgiving set of rules...

CHOOSING A LOVER

When choosing your partner-to-be in *Oblivion*, be sure to research your choice. Follow him around, listen to his conversations with the other townsfolk. Watch his daily routine; does he go to the pub too often? Does he indulge other ladyfolk in banal and stilted chatter about armour prices in the local boutique? You'll soon put a stop to that.

There are two important things you need from your husband-to-be; he has to have his own home, and he should visit the local chapel regularly. Because it's a pain to force people around, and impossible to push them into houses. It's helpful if they go voluntarily – at least, at first.

Waiting for a husband is a tedious business.



"Tell me honestly: does my bum look big in this?"



THE COURTING PROCESS

Getting someone to marry you in *Oblivion* is exactly the same as real life; flatter, boast, joke and bully the object of your love in a demented cycle that approaches mental torture. Pretty soon, they'll be so disorientated, and have such little self-esteem, they'll be eternally thankful for any glimpse of kindness that you show. If this doesn't work, you can always cast a charm spell.

This is all preamble and fluff, however; getting your man to 'like' you is just a basic courtesy measure. Because now, you're going to step it up a notch, and join them in your conjugal home.

PCZONE PCZONE

Autosaving...

"I know what you're thinking: 'What's a nice girl like me doing in a place like this?'"

I like what I see.

YOU'RE MY WIFE NOW, DAVE

Having attended chapel with them a couple of times – or at least, followed them into the church while invisible – we now feel we've got close enough on a spiritual level to presume a kind of common-law marriage. Who needs ceremonies and honeymoons when the love in our heart burns so bright?

To formalise our union, we waited for him to return home after a day of walking around and talking to those stupid cat whores, and followed him in. Because we're dealing with delicate issues of romance, we decided to barricade the door shut, just to be on the safe side.

WE'RE VERY MUCH IN LOVE

Having misunderstood our intentions, our true love doesn't seem happy at our sudden appearance. Perhaps the fact that we've had to murder his existing wife has given him pause for thought. However, in all fairness, it has to be said that he stepped over her corpse on his way to bed without batting an eyelid. Let's not fight, my darling; if you don't be quiet you'll end up alerting the local constabulary.

So he's into S&M – how marvellous!

THE REMAINS OF THE DAY

This isn't how our first night together was planned, but then again, all the great literary loves have ended with tragedy. This is pretty much *Romeo And Juliet*, word for word. Only instead of defying the rules of our families, we fought the rules of the game. And instead of a terrible misunderstanding leading to a mutual crypt-poisoning, we just punched each other. I suppose the final difference is that in Shakespeare's play, both characters died – and in our story, one person died, and the other person spent ten minutes rearranging his body on the bed.

It's a good job we're incapable of taking a step back and having a good, long look at what we appear to be doing for a living.

SEND US YOURS!

Have you found ways to play games in ways the developers never intended? Take a screenshot, video or just tell us what you did, and we'll print the best and put them online at www.pczone.co.uk. Email letters@pczone.co.uk, entitling your email 'PC ZONE Jackass'. Fame and prizes await!

This is not how our fantasy goes...

OTHER WAYS TO LOVE

If you find a house with two people in it, the possibilities for kinky three-way wife-swap romps is... Even more disturbing, when you consider you'll have to kill them both first, and spend long, awkward hours dragging them onto the bed. We'd hoped that the nude mod would have allowed us to recreate *Benny Hill*-style chase scenes; sadly, you have to kill people before you can remove their clothes, which robs the scene of its dynamic whimsy.

Finally, we should add that in the permissive world of Cyrodiil, any combination of boy, girl, cat or lizard is possible, but they all generally involve you killing your partner. There's equality for you. **PCZ**



Online Zone

www.pczone.co.uk


Can't wait for the next **PC ZONE**? Don't panic! Just hit **www.pczone.co.uk** now for up-to-the-minute news, exclusive features, forums, special competitions, pubcasts, deathmatch tournaments, online chats and the **PC ZONE** blog!



NOTES FROM THE FORUM

This month, there was a Claims To Fame pissing contest...

ON THE BLOG

What's been happening on **ZONE's** web diary this month...

WILL HAS NEVER hidden his ability to behave like a rampant nerd, but this month he had the opportunity to act like a rampant smug nerd, after receiving a *Fallout 3* lunch box with a nodding Vault Boy figure inside. He couldn't blog about it fast enough, and puffed his sparrow chest out with pride when someone posted the picture of him on a *Fallout* fansite. He'll have lots of exciting *Fallout 3* information for next issue, so stay perfectly still for a month.

Meanwhile, Log stole a **ZONE** template and started writing fake reviews, and asked you to do the same. The winning entry from Rob Pridham was a triumph of enthusiasm over paragraph structure and word flow.

Our blog can be read on the front page, at www.pczone.co.uk. It's a mixture of news, rubbish and "look at the amazing stuff we just got, aren't we just the bloody coolest?" In other words, a must-read.

"I used to play bass for a band called 65daysofstatic who are doing quite well. And I was in a pub in Sheffield the other day and Barry from *EastEnders* was on the next table."

g_hughes

"I've served David Gedge two pints of lager."

disappointment (Log)

"I served Jamie Baulch the other morning, and he regularly comes in for petrol at work."

G_Man_007

"Me me me! I got my *Black & White 2* flyer signed by Peter Molyneux and Ron Millar."

jonny_p66

"I once stood nary a metre away from Dirk Benedict and Richard Hatch. I wanted to get Dirk's autograph and say hi, but I came over far too starstruck and chickened out. I don't regret it, though. If I'd tried, I'd have got as far as eye contact, and my tears of

pure joystalgia would have caused my legs to slide right out from under me. Dirk Benedict!"

SunScramble

"When I was a young waiter in Ireland, I served Engelbert Humperdinck a crème brûlée. Now I know that seems too random to be true, but I'm being extremely honest here. I don't care if you believe me because it still happened."

escaped_monkey (Steve)



"Please release me, give me some crème brûlée..."

PCZONE PUBCAST!
Download the team's exclusive website-only pubcast NOW!

POSTCARDS FROM THE EDGE

WIN!

Send us your MMO character screenshots to win stuff...

You already know all about our 'PC ZONE Around The World' bit in Letters, where we ask you to send in your photos of yourself holding your favourite mag all over the globe. Well now, you're cordially invited to send us screenshots of you or your clan in your favourite MMO with a brief, jolly explanation of what you're up to. The best two postcards sent to us every month at letters@pczone.co.uk will be printed here and win a PC game. Get snapping...

FIGHT CLUB

Home of death & military pyramids

THIS MONTH'S FIGHT Club was the old reliable, *Counter-Strike: Source*, in a battle subtitled 'Ye Olde Mappes'. Militia, dust, office, you know the drill. And the one good thing about CS:S, despite the predictable cries of "not again", is that you can rely on a good turnout – the servers were already filling up when we arrived.

So, while Jamie, Will and Suzy played their usual game of two deaths to every kill, Log played his usual game of being utterly incapable of getting the damn thing started. Eventually, his whimpering forced Jamie to stand up and let him use his PC, and his mouth opened, he started panting and was happy again.

Despite feeling more outclassed than usual, there weren't so many kill-hungry German interlopers in the game this month, so when we tried to organise everyone for a team photo, it didn't descend into a bloodbath quite so quickly... Thanks to Frink for calling



COME AND TAKE ON THE ZONE STAFF IN OUR MONTHLY ONLINE GAMING FREE-FOR-ALL!



Log a n00b while he was trying to get a screenshot – you bully – and kudos to hypnotoad for having *Futurama's* Hypnotoad as a spray tag.

Next month, it's a return to *UT2004*. It'll be on Thursday July 26, at 6pm – so if you've uninstalled it to fit more porn on your 'puter, put it back right now.

[DM] Frink

The Fixer

The most fun anyone has ever had. Ever.



ZONE CHAT



Boom-chat-a-lack

ZONE CHAT IS rapidly becoming known as the foremost channel for highbrow deconstruction of modern gaming and savage insight into the videogames industry. Bon mots litter the #pcz channel, among which precious nuggets such as "Sony meh" and "I hear your mum has an opening" truly shone out.

We actually talked a fair amount about games this month – and Steve only mentioned his story about Valve saying he's the best at *Portal* once.

Will set the competition, and because he genuinely has nothing to talk about apart from his amazing *Fallout 3* freebies (see 'On The Blog', opposite), he asked for the name of his nodding figurine – and the winner was deanje, who receives a copy of the *Oblivion* expansion pack, *Shivering Isles*.

There'll be more unthemed and reader-led banter next month, on Wednesday, July 25 at 5.30pm, so install an IRC client, wink into a mirror at how clever you are, and wait until then.



How to join in!

If you fancy joining the **ZONE** Chat, you need an IRC program and an internet connection. We recommend mIRC, and you can find it on side two of our DVD. Just install, set the options, devise an online identity, connect to a QuakeNet server nearest to you, type /join #pcz into the command line, and hey presto, you're there! Chatting with the friendliest bunch of online readers you could hope to find. Remember, play nice and don't be rude.

Can't make Fight Club?

If you can't make it to Fight Club – perhaps you're too busy watching the fascinating inhabitants of the *Big Brother* house – then join other PCZ readers on the following public servers. Who knows, some of us might even be there. The latest info can be found at www.pczzone.co.uk.

WHO'S WHO

Jamie Sefton PCZ_NorthernScum
Will Porter PCZ_Batsphinx
Suzy Wallace PCZ_Uzibat
Steve Hogarty PCZ_escaped_monkey
Phil Wand PCZ_People's Front Of Judea
Jon Blyth PCZ_Log

1 COUNTER-STRIKE: SOURCE
cs.zonegames.co.uk:27015
cs.zonegames.co.uk:27025

2 HALF-LIFE 2 DEATHMATCH
hl2.zonegames.co.uk:27065

3 DAY OF DEFEAT: SOURCE
dod.zonegames.co.uk:27085

4 TEAM FORTRESS CLASSIC
tfc.zonegames.co.uk:27045

5 WOLFENSTEIN: ENEMY TERRITORY
et.zonegames.co.uk:27960

6 PREY
prey.zonegames.co.uk:27719

7 BATTLEFIELD 2142
bf2142.zonegames.co.uk:16567

8 JOINT OPERATIONS: TYPHOON RISING
Listed in NovaWorld

Greetings from Middle-earth



"Greetings from *LOTRO*, where I'm having a great time roaring in front of an orc-made statue of Sauron. I'm a huge nerd and a girl! My character's a guy though – I'd rather stare at a boy's backside."

Deathaniel Lolaloit
(Lindsay Arizono)

Wish You Were Here!



"Here's my Metalheads Of Mordor clan on a virtual pub crawl round The Shire in *LOTRO*. We're the largest kinship for lovers of metal, rock and goth music on Eldar server. We passed out in a shit-faced heap after this."

Seech
(Dave Hodrien)

LOOKING BACK

Retro ZONE

My Pokémans, let me show you them NINTENDO 64

EMULATION
OF THE
MONTH

BUT HOW?

There's a good number of emulators for the N64, but this is a recent-ish console, so a lot of the games are available for download on the Wii Virtual Console. We may be laughingly indifferent to people playing *Moon Cresta* for free, but ripping off a copy of *Ocarina Of Time* and getting many hours of stolen, beautiful gameplay is edging towards the indefensible. Where possible, we recommend you buy these games; where not possible... Well, here are some links...

Links...

1 Project 64

www.pj64-emu.com
The Project64 emulator.
You'll need a graphics card.

2 Rom Hustler

www.romhustler.net
A ROM site that won't let you download protected titles, so there.

NINTENDO IS A corporation. As such, it's every bit as psychopathic and cash-hungry as Wal-Mart and Tesco. On a business level, I'm sure their famous charms are as cynically manufactured as a Richard Curtis film, and all their talk of bringing people together is just to get them huddled more closely under the Nintendo umbrella.

So how exactly do Nintendo get away with all that public love? What comes across is that they just don't seem to be very good at the evil bits; you just get the feeling that even if they genuinely tried to stab a St Bernard, they'd end up tripping over, adopting it and calling it Colonel Glitterbean.

The company that redefined a perfectly good word for urine may be surfing the tides of public love at the moment, but let's not forget the nationally neglected N64. We've all got dozens of analogue thumbsticks these days, but that lonely joystick on the middle prong was pure innovation – playing *Mario 64* immediately blew



Pointy ears abound in *Majora's Mask*.



away any loyalties to the D-Pad, and if you add *Lylat Wars*' Rumble Pak, then you have the recipe for Sony's Dual Shock controller, right there.

Despite being the best machine of the era, the N64 suffered from its primary-coloured, childish image, especially compared to Sony's CD-fuelled FMV, which suddenly made videogames feel grown-up. And no matter how often the

N64 fans told you how gritty and brilliant *GoldenEye* and *Perfect Dark* were, the far more numerous cutesy-pie games – not to mention the stubborn refusal to move to CDs – made the system feel out of sync.

The N64 is recent enough for the game ROMs to be a little bit regulated; if you want to play the best, a few are available on the Wii's virtual console.

SIX OF THE BEST

Three cute, three dark; it wasn't all buttercups and candy kisses



BANJO-KAZOOIE

A glittering gem from Rare's Nintendo past, with charming bear/bird double-team action.

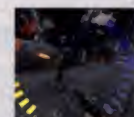
SUPER MARIO 64

Remade for DS, the handheld version still doesn't do justice to the ground-breaking original.



POKÉMON SNAP

On-rails Meowth-snapping in a rare break from the strict and winning Pokémon trading formula.



GOLDENEYE 007

The grown-up killer app that every older N64 owner would desperately namecheck to impress.



PERFECT DARK

The latest 360 version crimps an indifferent one off on this excellent lady-led spy shooter.



OCARINA OF TIME

Despite two generations of graphical improvements, *Ocarina* is still the finest *Zelda* to date.

NOW & THEN

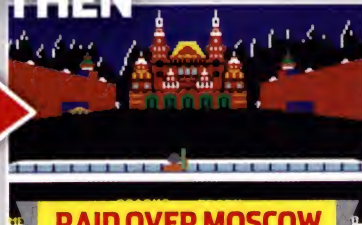
Fallout vs Raid Over Moscow

NOW



FALLOUT 3

THEN



RAID OVER MOSCOW

What with Putin threatening to point a missile at Finland (but even he admits he'd try to save Lordi), there's never been a better time to celebrate soviet aggression with *World In Conflict*, and post-apocalyptic dog-punching with *Fallout 3*.

Before we do just that though, let's not forget the first thing to crystallise that Cold War sensation of impending doom into a game: *Raid Over Moscow*. America's most canny diplomatic move, the game made a particularly moist splash in Finland, after the keen-to-not-piss-Russia-off government wondered whether selling the game was strictly cricket.

This isn't as pessimistic as *Fallout*, though; with just a bunch of stealth bombers, you can save the non-evil world by playing a series of sub-games. From flying through trees and shaking off pursuers à la *Return Of The Jedi*, to blowing up nuclear reactors with frisbees – like *Discs of Tron* – *Raid Over Moscow* made the whole war feel a lot less terrifying, far more jaggedy and blocky, and was one of the best things to happen to the Commodore 64. Not to mention the whole of Western civilisation. Thanks, US Gold!

PLAY IT!

Raid Over Moscow was available on a number of platforms, but we played it on the C64, using the CCS64 emulator.

- 1 The CCS64 emulator lives at www.computerbrains.com/ccs64/
- 2 There's an article about the game, and a highly useful link right here: tinyurl.com/5dkdr
- 3 Did you know that the C64 tape image files have a .p00 extension? Heh... p00.
- 4 Put the virtual cassette in your cyber datasette, and press the invisible play button.
- 5 Now try to work out which buttons to press, 'cos we ruddy couldn't.



MAME FRAME

Super Bishi Bashi Champ Developer: Konami | Year: 1998

There's no way the creators of *Banzai* hadn't spent hours hammering away at the oversized primary tricolour of *Bishi Bashi* buttons. The hyperactive super-Japanese animations, the stringing together of endlessly creative little games, the hilarious shouting men – it's the game that Burt Kwouk should have been narrating while he was singing *Hey, Little Hen* on Harry Hill's show.

The *Bishi Bashi* gameplay is such intuitive, manic simplicity that you can happily play the Japanese language versions available for download – and to be honest, it's funnier that way anyway. Completely understanding what's going on robs the game of some of the frantic charm.

The mini-game most people will mention when you bring up *Super Bishi Bashi Champ* is the pie-throwing bride – but other occasions when the surreal chaos drifts into absurd focus is when your super-cartoonish characters sneak behind a photo-realistic armed guard in a cardboard box.

The rest? Well, play them through yourself. Sure, the ROMs have some graphical and sound glitches, but you'll get the idea.



WHAT IS MAME?

MAME is the Multiple Arcade Machine Emulator, currently emulating over 6,000 games. You can download it from www.mame.net – use Mame32 for a nice front-end. Then you can download *Robby Roto*, which is legal. You can play all the others too, but not legally. So stop it. Right now.

BACK IN THE DAY...



AN APOLOGY TO GRANNY

By Jon 'Log' Blyth

Somewhere in my grandmother's house is a cassette that she treasures. It's from 1990, before I used my A-levels as an excuse to give up playing the piano. Before I did give up, I made my grandmother a compilation tape of the pieces I knew; *The Entertainer*, some Scherzo or other, the odd Hungarian dance. She genuinely treasures this Ferric D90, and I think she mourns the loss of that polite, studious child to alcohol abuse and dick-led shenanigans in Manchester. Anyway, I've got something to confess.

I did it on my Atari ST! I programmed it all! Your treasured possession is nothing more than an invisible robot playing through my MIDI ports! Suckered! So, as I said. Sorry about that.

SUPERTEST

THE BEAT ELITE AGENTS



Has sci-fi gaming actually advanced since Bell 'n' Braben's classic?

YOUR VIEW

Last month we were hating on them games, and what they do to make us mad. What had you up in arms?

GAME DESIGN

"When you get to a place in a game, and it requires a thing you now have to go aeons back into the game for. Also, all the crappy release-day bugs we're lumbered with nowadays. Ubisoft are arseholes."

JBeckwith

THE WINDOWS BUTTON

"When you accidentally hit the 'Windows/Context Menu' button, and the game minimises to the taskbar. Another one is stupid anti-virus software deciding to update itself and popping you out of your game."

mhaswell

NPC HELL

"Any bit, in any game, where you have to escort NPCs who must survive. They're invariably stupid and get themselves killed."

-Doomus-

SPAWNY GET

"Enemies popping into existence just around the corner until you hit a trigger point, or just never stopping at all. When I clear an area, I want it to stay clear."

g_hughes

PATRONISING

"I hate the tutorial in *Black & White 2*! Every time I want another cow, I need to learn how to select it from two flying fat men."

Chipmonkcheeks

IT'S THE KIND of question that can only be asked in a stubborn, begrudging way, that implies that you've made your mind up before you even start talking about it, and you can sit there talking till you're blue in the face, but me and my opinion are just going to sit here looking pleased with ourselves because we know we're right.

That was the rather curmudgeonly premise of this month's Supertest – are sci-fi games doomed to forever exist in the shadow of a game that didn't even have filled-in polygons? What's more, Glastonbury and illness had whittled our team down to Steve, Will and a bad-tempered Log – who never really liked space-combat games in the first place, apart from maybe *Descent*, and doesn't see why he has to sit in a stupid room talking about this rubbish with two people he's frankly sick of looking at.

There weren't the screaming LOLs of the last couple of months in this month's Supertest – we were tired, and there

weren't many of us. Essentially, this was an excuse for Will and Steve to talk about their piratical antics of yesteryear, but by the end of our 20 minutes, even Log had gotten the itch to go back to *KOTOR*, and be proper evil.

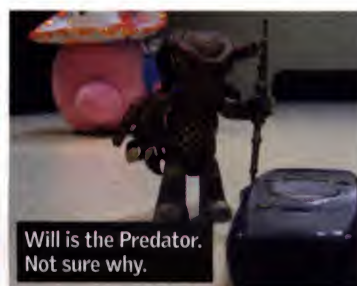
What are your sci-fi gaming highlights? What do you think is the bestest thing about space and lasers and big whoop-whoop sounds? You're bursting with hot, fresh opinions – we can smell them on you. Come to pczone.co.uk and put them into our forums. Come on. Give us your brains, you selfish swines! **PCZ**



Steve/Sonic lets rip on *Elite*.



Mr Driller is meant to be Log.



Will is the Predator. Not sure why.



X3: a king among space games, and no mistake.

STEVE HILL'S NeverQuest



**Steve Hill celebrates the Summer Solstice in
*The Lord Of The Rings Online: Shadows Of Angmar...***

I'VE GOT A ticket to Glastonbury and I'm staring into the abyss. That abyss is in the shape of a Fell Scrying Pool, from which I have recently emerged having spent time as a rabid dog, my only friend being a giant spider called Limbs.

No, I haven't been at the mushrooms; this is life in the Shire. So while the amateur jugglers in jesters' hats head for Avalon, I'm ensconced in Bree, sporting the headwear of the humble hobbit. Having a quick scout around the town centre, it appears that almost everybody has gone to Glastonbury, or at least somewhere, as the place is emptier than Mrs Beckham's fridge.

"Where is everyone?" I yell. "I've got Lemas bread."

Indeed I have, courtesy of ZONE's own Will Porter, which was accompanied by a phone lecture as to its magical properties, shamelessly carried out in full earshot of other people. Turns out that the Lembas Of Duillond, to give it its official monicker, is the fabled waybread of the elves, with mystical qualities that can last up to a day.

There are no takers though, and I'm drawn towards a Human Crier, who barks: "Summerdays has opened at the Bree-fields party grounds! Marvel at the

fireworks, enjoy a game of Hobnannigan, or simply come for a pint!"

The latter piques my interest, and I peruse a flier for the Summer Solstice Festival. 'Party like it's the Second Age!' it commands. 'Get ready for dancing, games and more as you join in the revelry in Eriador!' I'm particularly drawn to the invitation to, 'Join in madcap chicken-chasing games!', and by way of a warm-up swing a hobbit boot at a nearby hen.

FOWL PLAY

Farother, Father Of Storeman, immediately recognises my skills and invites me to take part in a game of chicken football. Jumping at the chance, I join him pitch-side, where the referee is already in the centre, flanked by Flying Feathers captain, Haggo Boffin, and his Steel Beaks counterpart, Carnelian Bracegirdle. However, crucially, there are no chickens and no teams.

"What now?" I ask my new friend.

"We wait..." says Farother.

And we wait. By now I'm feeling a bit peckish, so I tuck into a loaf of Lembas. Immediately, I begin to feel a bit funny, even more so when Farother conjures a campfire out of thin air.

Despite a few heckles of 'Come on ref!', it doesn't look like the match is going

to start any time soon. Perhaps out of frustration, Farothers offers me a fight, routinely pummelling me in what could be the first recorded case of chicken football hooliganism. Dusting myself off, I ask him how long he's prepared to wait to kick a chicken.

COME DANCING

Not long it seems, so I ask him if there are any other events. He shows me the way to a dancing contest, although he does warn: "It's quite lame." He's not wrong, and with some poor man's Morris dancing, the atmosphere is flatter than a witch's tit.

"This is boring," correctly surmises Farothers. "Bye Hillo."

With that, my only friend is gone, the Lembas bread has kicked in, and I'm alone at the worst festival on Middle-earth. I might as well try to enjoy it, so I head straight for the pipeweed vendor and buy myself a big bag of Summer Green-Weed, 'a fine variety of pipe-weed that's usually available during the summer.' Unfortunately, I don't have a pipe. Looking to take the edge off the Lembas, I gratefully sink a frothy pint of ale.

It seems I've joined the party late, as people are lying unconscious under tables, and one man even appears to have drowned. The festival is pressing on regardless, and a ginger-bearded chap asks me if I could nip out and get him

some fireworks. Moving briefly back to the real world, my last experience of fireworks at a festival was Glastonbury 2004, when a 6am rocket failed to launch, leaving me with temporary deafness in my right ear, and a lasting image of a well-refreshed Kate Moss running for her life.

ROCKET MAN

Nevertheless, my hobbit self takes on the challenge and sets out to find a 24-hour firework shop. Unsurprisingly, they're a bit thin on the ground, although I do find myself stumbling into an abandoned graveyard, where a lone mourner is sobbing uncontrollably. Still reeling from the Lembas, it all goes a bit *Easy Rider*, and I quickly make my excuses and leave.

At which point I inadvertently surprise a Southern Poacher, who wades into me with a club, leaving me no choice but to slay her with a blast on my lute. Now weakened, a Foraging Bear deals me a killer blow. Glastonbury beckons: start the car. **PC7**



Eriador: a barrel of laughs.

**Dusting myself off, I ask him how long
he's prepared to wait to kick a chicken...**



Not dance two, you moron.

'Dance three is the step here!'



Watch out ladies, here he comes.

DEVELOPER'S COMMENTARY

LORD OF THE RINGS ONLINE: SHADOWS OF ANGMAR

Jon Blyth swaps phat loot for a fat lute and sings his way through the Shire...

THE ONLINE VERSION of Tolkien's tomes has only managed to recreate a tiny portion of his world so far, and with their first expansion pack, *Shores Of Evendim*, developers Turbine have just added another 1,500 acres to that world. Normally, Developer's Commentary is a look back over the creation of the game, but *LOTRO* is a going concern, and for Turbine, the development never stops. We spoke to Jeffrey Steefel (right), the executive producer of Middle-earth's online incarnation...



01 NO REST: "We're thinking of this like a TV series instead of a movie. We just launched the pilot and thanks to the reviews, we've been picked up for an entire season. Now, our job is to deliver on that, because people are paying a subscription and this is really more of an ongoing entertainment experience that people are expecting to grow and evolve. They want significant, high-quality, fresh content that's frequently added. That's something we've done as a company in the past. *Asheron's Call* has been out for over seven years, and the latest count was 88 updates in that time. This game is far bigger and far more complex, but we announced the *Shores Of Evendim* expansion just six weeks after the launch of *LOTRO*."



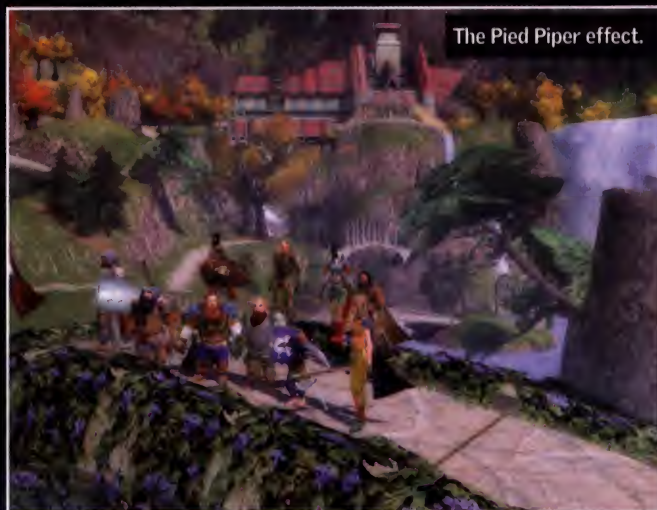
Tolkien by design.

02 **NEXT CHAPTER:** "You're looking at a whole new region in the game. There's six-million square metres, which increases the size of the game (in terms of land mass) by 10%. There's nine new monsters, and some of them have completely different AI and functionality in the game, and behave differently to any other monsters in it. There are many new instances, and not just little ones – we're talking the massive instances that people are beginning to expect from the game. We've got over 120 new quests and a whole bunch of new content for people in the level 27-40 range, which is where we believe a lot of people are getting to now."



That's a big dwarf you got there.

03 **SWEET MUSIC:** "People really love the music system, so we've expanded it. Some of it is just making it better, so you can do octaves more easily, sustain notes, play chords, things like that. We also added bass and drums, and we added the ability for you to do a piano roll. There's also a text music notation that's standard called ABC, and because it's been around so long there are a lot of third-party programs out there that are free to translate midi-files or music notation files into these text files, and our game supports them. So you can write music, put it in these text files, put it into a directory and then you can actually play it in the game. It's very cool."



The Pied Piper effect.



AMARJOR

His cape is dandy, but he paddles alone.

"People love the music system, so we added bass and drums, as well as the ability for you to do a piano roll"

Jeffrey Steefel, executive producer, *Lord Of The Rings Online*

04 **I MONSTER:** "Monster Play is going to be more and more about giving monsters their own kind of advancement paths. Even right now, you're collecting destiny points that you can spend on buffs for your monster. On your character, when you click on the tab that says 'War', it displays all your monsters – we'll be adding the ability to examine that on another player. This way, your monsters are more a part of your overall character, and you can see who's pretty accomplished at the Monster Play and PVP."



05 PUTTING THE FAN INTO FANTASY: "I'm sitting next to my original copies of *Lord Of The Rings*, which dates me a little bit. They're from 1965, which is when they were released back in the US. I read them as a kid and I came back to them again later in life. I also played *Dungeons & Dragons* as a kid, but grew out of that quite quickly. But the more I've learned about Tolkien, the more fascinated I am with it, and so I read more. There's people on my team that know everything you can imagine knowing about Tolkien and his literature. I've got someone on my team who actually reads and writes the runes..."

Anyone know the Samaritans number?

06 HUMOUR: "There's a lot of humour in Tolkien, but it's a bit dry and more sophisticated. I think it's also kind of buried beneath the drama, chaos, evil and everything else that's going on. I thought they did a really good job of putting that across in the movies; the whole way that Sam, Merry and Pippin were played for comic relief. That relationship really is in the books. Hobbits in particular are sources of humour, because they're provincial people generally speaking, and very opinionated.

"We're not talking about it at this stage, but one of the things that's going to happen with this new update are some live events, and there's going to be some really funny stuff in that, too. Minstrels playing Rolling Stones and Pink Floyd with the in-game music system. I've heard it's amazing."

07 THE JACKASS FACTOR: "In some respects, letting the player make his own fun is what these games are about, and we're going to be focusing on that increasingly. The first thing you want to make sure you deliver is the environment – that it's a great place to be in – and in our case, it needs to be a place that feels like you're really in Tolkien's world. We feel like we did that. Also, we needed to present a game that's structured and fun: something that really gives you guidance through your experience, so we don't just drop you somewhere and say, 'Have fun!' The next big thing is to give you tools and ways to make your own fun – everything from the music system to the live events we're doing. A lot of people don't know that there's already a version of tag that you can play."



All dressed for Oktoberfest.

08

IT'S NICE, BUT IS IT TOLKIEN?: "We understand that Middle-earth is *the* fantasy destination, and it's got to be right. Tolkien Enterprises have been great though: they know we're making a game, and there has to be a magic-using class. People really want magic, and they want it to be fun. People want things that flash and explode, and lasers that fly through the air, and clearly nobody did that in Middle-earth. But as long as you wrap it up right, and you make it clear he's doing these things through learning and wisdom and is understanding how to summon the natural energies in Middle-earth, then everyone's fine with it. They've come to really trust us, and that helps a lot. Especially with Angmar, which isn't described much in the books, and doesn't exist as a viable entity in the third age."



Undignified acts no.61:
riding an overweight pony.

09

ART FOR ART'S SAKE: "We had to be careful not to copy the movies, because our licences were for the book. Plus, we wanted to make sure that our focus was on the source material itself. Instead of worrying about 'let's be like this' or 'not like this', the only thing that matters is, was it described in the book, and if so, how was it described? Gandalf is described as a guy in a great pointy hat with a long white beard, so our Gandalf is going to look a lot like the movie Gandalf. We do whatever makes sense – sometimes it's like the movies and sometimes it isn't."



Swords: not really
appropriate at this range.

Every morning, he looked
in the mirror and cried.

10

BOW TO WOW: "I ran the studio at Sony for a while, and until *WOW* came out, the prevalent conversation was always that there'd be a couple of million people willing to play these games, but it was a narrow, niche market. Now, we're exactly where we want to be: if you ask people who are the leaders in the MMO base, *WOW* and *LOTRO* are the two games they're going to mention. We're the only other people in there as far as we're concerned, and that's great – because we offer a lot of other things that *WOW* doesn't. One of those things is going to be the way in which we run the service in terms of live updates and live events. What's happening ongoing in the live experience is as important as the actual product that's shipped." **PCZ**

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This month's question: what are you most afraid of?

CYBER-HUMANS

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Managing Editor Clare Lydon 020 7042 4723. Spurs being relegated
Deputy Editor Will Porter 020 7042 4725. Bees/wasps
Art Editor Dale Pringle 020 7042 4727. Playing Suzy of Street Fighter
Deputy Art Editor Kevin Pratt 020 7042 4722. Rats
Reviews Editor Suzy Wallace 020 7042 4726. Anything pink and frilly
Section Editor Steve Hogarty 020 7042 4728. Tomato ketchup
Staff Writer Jon Blyth 020 7042 4724. Being hugged by a statue
Contributors Pavel Barter (Space Girls reunion), Julie Bennett (Meat),
Gavin Griepoulos (Cows), Steve Hill (Losing the remote control),
Steve Hutchinson, Martin Korda (Rationing), Dan Marshall (Spiders),
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(Swampy Holland), Phil Wand (Deep water) and Michael Wass
PCZONE.CO.UK Editor Gavin Ogden 020 7042 4311
Hardware Photography In-house
Origination ColourFlow 020 7323 0022
Printed in the UK by Southern Print
Distribution Seymour Distribution Ltd

KERAK

Group Publisher James Binns
Assistant Publisher Lee Nutter
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Product Manager Helen Cullen
Marketing Executive Kim Brown
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Distributed by Seymour Distribution Ltd,
2 East Poultry Avenue, London, EC1A 9PT.
Tel: 0207 429 4000.



Printed in the UK by
Southernprint

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Stock Exchange (symbol: FUTR)

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Registered office: Future Publishing Ltd, Beauford Court,
10 Monmouth Street, Bath, BA1 2BW. www.futureplc.com

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NEXT ISSUE PCZ #185

On sale Thursday, August 16. And by then, the football
season will have restarted. Thanks be to god



When you have finished with
this magazine please recycle it.

All details correct at the time of going to press. But they might change. We're fickle like that.

NEXT MONTH

3 MASSIVE REVIEWS!



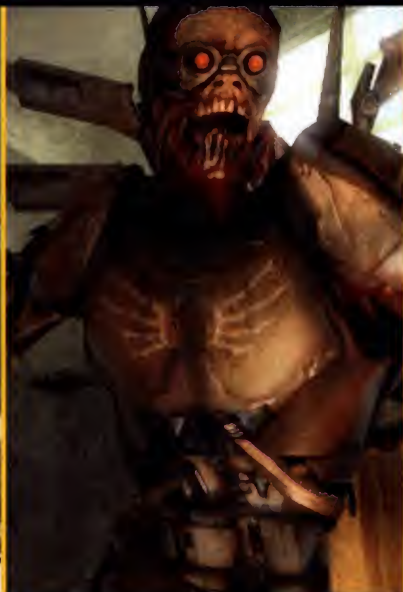
BIOSHOCK

The Big Daddy of submerged
shooters finally comes to the
surface – we'll deliver our
definitive verdict!



STARCRAFT II

Hands-on with Blizzard's
long-awaited sci-fi sequel –
new gameplay revelations!



ENEMY TERRITORY: QUAKE WARS

Splash Damage and id's
multiplayer Strogg 'em up –
is it the game we wanted?



F.E.A.R. SEQUEL

Exclusive interview and pics
from Monolith's F.E.A.R.
follow-up. Be very afraid!



MEDIEVAL II: TOTAL WAR – KINGDOMS

Read the verdict on
The Creative Assembly's
epic RTS expansion



FALLOUT 3

Bethesda's post-apocalyptic
RPG – new info and screens!



MEDAL OF HONOR: AIRBORNE

Huge playtest of EA's new open-level WWII
FPS. Can the series recapture the crown
from Call Of Duty? Find out next month...

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SPACE ZOMBIES IN SPACE VS TIME PIRATE 1988

SPACE ZOMBIES IN SPACE by Steve Hogarty
VS TIME PIRATE 1988 by Jon 'Log' Blyth

It's the space-time showdown science said could never happen – Geoffrey, the flamboyant star of *Time Pirate 1988* has materialised on planet Alpha Beta Delta X-72 almost in the year 4724 – immediately before the attack of the *Space Zombies In Space* attacked the planet Alpha Beta Delta X-72! In 4724,

Prepare yourself for guns, swashbuckling, deaths, and lolcats as the sexless pirate captain forms an unlikely alliance with Godzilla and Wonder Woman. Can they stop the Nazi Space Zombie Menace before the T-Virus infects the mechanical prince who holds the last piece of the talisman? Not if the ghost of cabin boy Brian May can help it!

Just bought a copy of Pippa Funnell's *Equine Glitterstorm*? Don't be ashamed – we know it's for someone else. But what will the brutish, judgemental staff of CEX think, with their shouting metal and dancing on them scooter-boards? Simply cut out and insert this page into your DVD sleeve, and hey presto! One game disguise that you can see through a little bit, because they're too cheap to print our mag on posh paper.



18+

Sssshhh! You'll wake the ever-living Nazi menace!

CUT OUT AND KEEP Disguise your embarrassing game purchase by sliding this into any DVD case.

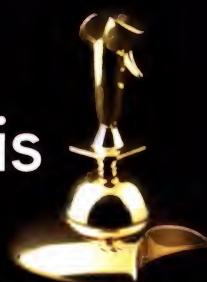


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